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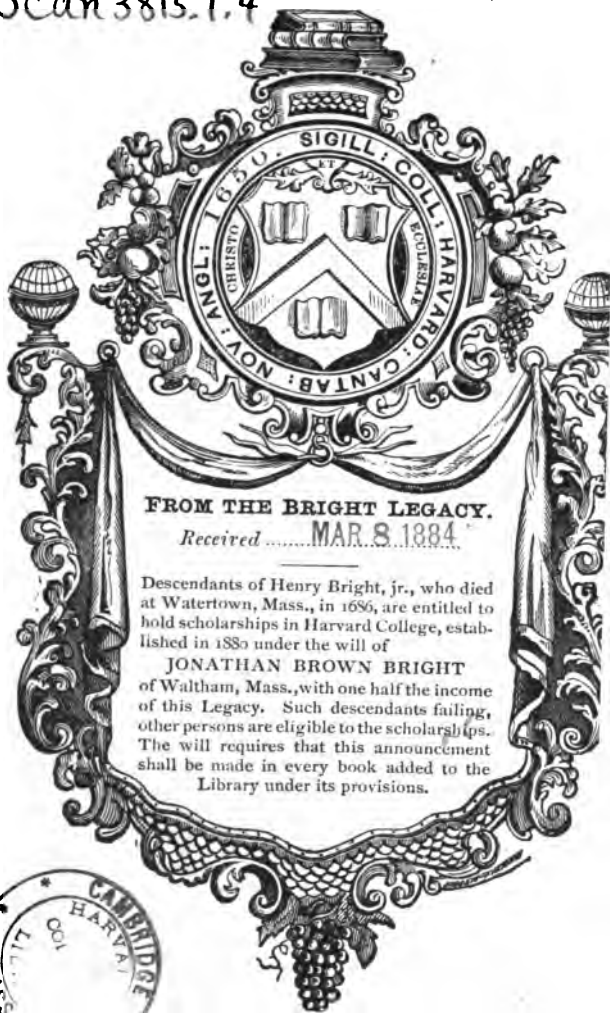
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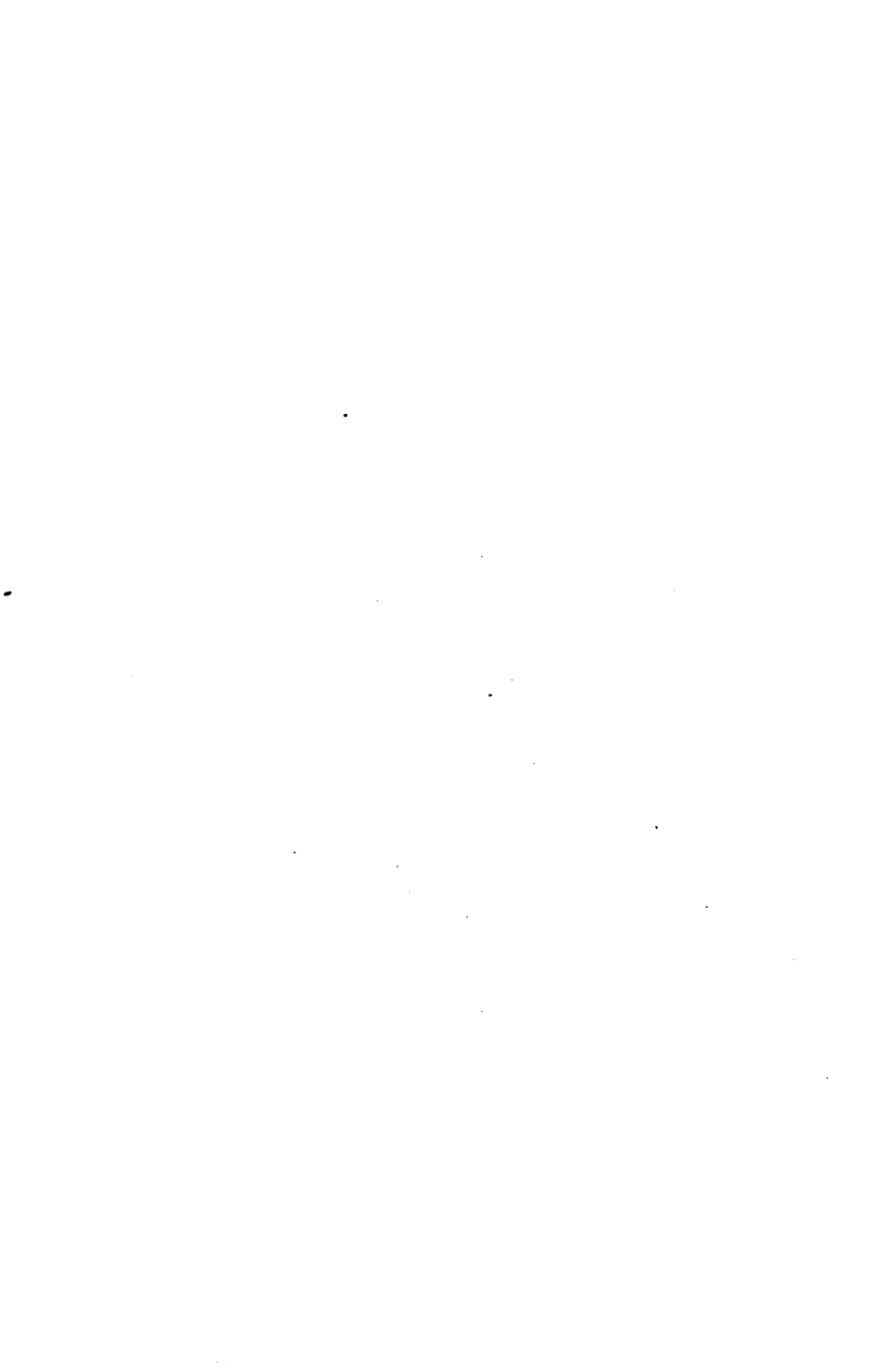
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THE  
PRIVATE LIFE  
OF  
THE OLD NORTHMEN.

TRANSLATED FROM THE POSTHUMOUS WORKS OF

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BY THE  
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THORVALDSEN," ETC. ETC.

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C  
LONDON:  
CHAPMAN AND HALL, 193, PICCADILLY.

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1868.

Scan. 3815, 1.4

~~I, 1048~~

MAR 8 1884

*Bright Land.*

LONDON:  
PRINTED BY WOODFALL AND KINDER,  
MILFORD LANE, STRAND, W.C.

# CONTENTS.

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	PAGE
INTRODUCTORY . . . . .	1
CHAPTER I.	
EDUCATION AND BRINGING UP OF YOUTH . . . . .	3
CHAPTER II.	
WEDLOCK . . . . .	17
CHAPTER III.	
DWELLING-HOUSES . . . . .	54
CHAPTER IV.	
DRESS . . . . .	75
CHAPTER V.	
THEIR DAILY LIFE AND OCCUPATIONS . . . . .	101
CHAPTER VI.	
AMUSEMENTS . . . . .	137
CHAPTER VII.	
FUNERAL CUSTOMS . . . . .	173



## OLD NORSE PRONUNCIATION.

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á is pronounced like *ow*.

ú       "       "       *u* in full.

ð       "       "       soft *d*.

þ       "       "       *th*.

# PRIVATE LIFE

OF

## THE OLD NORTHMEN.

---

### INTRODUCTORY.

As a natural consequence of the force of circumstances, the private as well as the public life of a people must needs undergo many visible changes in the course of ages; and if those in the former case do not occur so suddenly as is often the case in the latter, not the less are they frequently very conspicuous, and instrumental in operating upon the character and constitution of an entire nation. The Northmen form no exception to this general rule. It was, undoubtedly, the transition from paganism to Christianity that caused the greatest revolutions in their domestic life, not only because their ideas of religion were thereby completely subverted, but also because their peaceful intercourse with foreign nations, owing to the same cause, then for the first time assumed much more important dimensions than heretofore.

These changes, however, were, as is universally the

case, of gradual growth, and did not at once, visibly at least, succeed the causes of their origin. Indeed, it was only towards the close of the eleventh century, under the reign of Olaf Kyrre, that any apparent alterations in morals or in customs took place at court: alterations, however, which, little by little, made their influence felt upon the people at large. With a hankering after pomp and pageantry—from which the old Northmen, even from the very earliest ages, had not been entirely free—there was now united a desire to imitate the more comfortable manner of life adopted by southern nations; and thus the domestic habits of the people either underwent a sudden and radical change, or gradually adapted themselves to the pattern from which they were copied.

It is our purpose, in the following pages, to draw the attention of the reader to the habits and customs of the old Northmen during the period when the Scandinavian peninsula had not as yet emerged from the darkness of Paganism; while at the same time the changes that resulted from the introduction of Christianity into the country shall not be passed by unnoticed.

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## CHAPTER I.

## EDUCATION AND BRINGING UP OF YOUTH.

It was the custom with the old Northmen in the Pagan ages for the father to decide, directly a child was born, whether it should be exposed, or be brought up. If the father were not present himself, or if he had made no previous arrangement about the child, it then devolved upon the nearest male relative, who happened to be present at the birth, to decide on the life or death of the infant in question. The newly born child was laid down on the ground by the woman who had assisted at the birth, and there it remained, untouched by any one, till the momentous decision had been arrived at.

It has been supposed by some that the exposure of a child only took place when it was found to be either deformed, or more than usually weakly, and that the object of this custom, therefore, was to prevent the physical deterioration of the people. And it does not appear to be improbable that this might have been the case with a race of people who laid such great stress on manly strength and courage as did the old Northmen, especially as the most ancient Christian laws have permitted the exposure of infants which were deformed in a high degree. Still no mention is ever made, in any place in the old Sagas where the exposure of infants is referred

to, leading one to suppose that such had been the object in view.

Other causes are, however, expressly alluded to as sanctioning exposure, namely, a "difference between man and wife;" "displeasure on the part of the wife's father, or nearest relative, at the union of which the child was the fruit;" "the persuasions of the wife, in the case that an illegitimate child was born to her husband;" "superstitious beliefs, in the case where evil omens were thought to presage misfortunes which could be averted through the child;" and finally, "the inability of the parents through poverty to bring up their offspring." It is only in the last-named case that exposure is spoken of as being excusable; in the others, though a perfectly legitimate deed, it was considered to be highly culpable. Many places in the Sagas exemplify this.

Hövdling (chieftain) Asbjörn Dettiaas, of Iceland, was exasperated against his wife Thorgerd, because without his consent or knowledge she had given their daughter away to a Northman. Some few years after this Thorgerd became in the family way, and her husband ordered that if a child should be born during his absence from home, it was to be exposed, whether it proved to be a boy or a girl. His wife remonstrated with him, urging that "such a proceeding ill suited a man who was so powerful and wise as he was, and that even had he been a poor man it would be a highly blamable deed; how much more blamable, therefore, would it be in his case, who possessed such great wealth?" But Asbjörn paid no heed to her remonstrances,

"He had determined," he said, "when she gave away his daughter in marriage without his knowledge, that she should never have the chance of bringing up any more children to give away without his consent." During her husband's absence Thorgerd was brought to bed with a beautiful boy, and though it grieved her very much, still she dared not disobey her husband's command, and the babe was exposed.

An Icelandic chieftain, Valbrand, had given away his daughter Signy in marriage, against her own and her brother Torfe's wish, to Grimkel. The union proved to be an unhappy one, for the contracting parties could not agree.

Once, when Signy was on a visit at her brother's, she gave birth to a fine girl; but the labour was a hard one, and Signy died almost immediately. Torfe had not sprinkled the child with water, preferring rather to wait and see how it should fare with his sister. When she died he became so exasperated that he ordered his foster-son, Sigurd, to take it and cast it into the brook. Sigurd replied, "that it was an evil deed;" but still, not liking to disobey Torfe, he carried the child away, and, instead of throwing it into the water, laid it down on a place where he hoped it would soon be found; and thus he saved the child's life.

Here is yet another instance of a similar kind. "The Norwegian chief, Gudbrand Kula, had conceived a great dislike to his daughter Aasta's husband, King Harald Grenske, because he had wanted to abandon his wife in

order to marry the Swedish queen, Sigrid Storrade. When Aasta, after her husband's death, was brought to bed with a son, her father gave orders that the child should be exposed, and was only induced to counter-order his commands on being told that a wondrous light had shone over the house where the child was born."

"Thorkel Geitisson's dumb sister, Orny, was pregnant by a Northman, Ivar Ljome, who had been living some time in Thorkel's house. Ivar refused to marry the girl, and quitted the island. A short time after, when she gave birth to a boy, Thorkel gave orders that it should be exposed.

"'It was a law in those days,' says the Saga, 'that poor folk might expose their children if they pleased, but it does not appear to have been a good law.' Thorkel ordered his slave to kill the child; and though the man sought to excuse himself, and though several people interfered in the child's behalf, Thorkel was inflexible, and the slave was compelled, though against his will, to expose the child in the forest."

It is told, too, of "Thorgrim, of Kornsa, in Iceland, that, at his wife's solicitation, he caused a child to be exposed which his concubine had brought him."

"The renowned Icelandic chieftain, Thorstein Eigilsson, once had a dream, of which a Northman gave the following interpretation:—'A daughter would be born to him, of whom two illustrious men would in time become enamoured; and that they would both die fighting each other to see who was to get her.' Before Thorstein rode away

to the 'Thing' (Assize, assembly) in the summer, he commanded his wife, Jofrid, who was pregnant, that if she were brought to bed during his absence, the child was to be exposed, if it was a girl; but if it was a boy, she was to bring it up. 'It was the custom,' adds the Saga, 'while the whole of Iceland was pagan, for poor folk who had a number of helpless children, to have them exposed; and yet it seems to have been a very bad custom.' Jofrid represented to her husband that it was wrong for him, who was a wealthy man, to act in such a way; but Thorstein was inexorable, and gave strict orders that he should be obeyed.

"During her husband's absence, Jofrid gave birth to a girl of extraordinary beauty. The women folk wished to bring it to her, but she said that they must not do so. Thereupon she ordered the shepherd to bear the child away, giving him strict orders, however, to take the child to a relative, who would bring it up clandestinely. When Thorstein returned home she told him that the child had been exposed, whereupon her husband commended her for having acted as he had bade her."

When people who were not impelled by poverty exposed their children, the death of the child was of course the object in view, and yet they do not seem either to have laid violent hands on it themselves, or to have got others to do it for them. Only in one instance has death by drowning been recorded. The plan generally adopted was to place the infant in a covered grave, and there leave it to die; or else to expose it in some lonely spot, either in a cavity between the rocks, or under the roots of a hollow



tree, where the wild animals would not be likely to find it.

Very frequently some nourishment was placed in the child's hand, which it could suck, and thus life might be sustained till possibly some compassionate person might find it and take pity on it.

Thus it is recorded of an illegitimate child that Thorgrim of Kornsaa had exposed, that it was hidden under a pile of stones, and that something was spread over its face, which it tried to remove from its nose. In this condition it was discovered by Thorstein Ingemundsson and his brother Thorer, who took it and brought it up, in accordance with an oath which Thorstein had made to the Creator of the Sun.

When the child of Asbjörn Dettiaas was to be exposed, it is said that its mother Thorgerd got some people to take it away and treat it as was customary. Accordingly they carried the child away from the house, laid it between two stones, and put a piece of salt pork in its mouth, and then left it. Fortunately for the infant, it was discovered by two poor people, who took it and adopted it as their own.

The child of Orny and Ivar Ljome was taken out into the forest by their bondsman, Freystein, who wrapped it up in a cloth, and placing a piece of salt pork in its mouth, deposited it in a hole under the roots of a tree, not leaving it till "he had arranged everything in the best way he could."

There is therefore great reason to suppose that people

who exposed their child on the plea of being so poor that they could not possibly support it, did not necessarily wish for the child's death, but rather entertained the hope that it might be found and adopted by some compassionate person or other.

Christianity abolished, or at all events greatly circumscribed, this barbarous and unnatural custom. In Norway, it appears that the introduction of Christianity was immediately followed by a law which rendered any person who exposed a child liable to outlawry and the forfeiture of his goods. Only in the case where the child was so deformed that it could take no nourishment was its exposure permissible. It might then be conveyed to a desert place, and there be covered with stones. If it was deformed in a lesser degree, it was to be taken to the church, and be laid down outside the church door, where its nearest relative was to keep watch over it till it was dead.

In Iceland, however, it was not deemed expedient to forbid the exposure of infants immediately on the introduction of Christianity into the island. And the reason of this was that the people considered it to be unjust to be deterred from exposing their children, and at the same time be prevented from eating horse-flesh, which had hitherto been their chief means of subsistence. Twenty years later, however, St. Olaf managed to get the custom abolished from the island.

Naturally, it was only an exceptional case for a parent to expose his child; in most instances it was brought up.

The child was thereupon taken up from off the ground, and carried to the father, if he happened to be present, who, by taking it in his arms, or by covering it with his cloak, publicly acknowledged that he took upon himself the duty of rearing it.

Thereupon the child was sprinkled over with water, whilst the person who performed this ceremony at the same time bestowed a name upon it. This sprinkling with water (*at ausa barn vatni*) was considered to be a sacred rite in the pagan days, in fact was regarded as the baptism of Christians in later days, and after its performance it was accounted murder to expose the child, or in any other way to do away with it. The person who named the child always accompanied the office with a present, called *nafnfestr*, consisting usually of rings or weapons, or sometimes, in the case of the children of chieftains, in houses or estates. It was not, however, new-born children only that were the recipients of these *nafnfestr* (gifts), but older people also came in for such presents, when a king or a chief gave them a peculiar surname as a mark of honour.

The sprinkling with water and the naming the child was generally undertaken by the father, or by some one or other of the nearest relatives present, or even by one of the father's very intimate friends. The children were named after some gallant ancestor, relative, or friend, and it was supposed that the fortune of the latter would follow the child through life.

When the child's teeth began to appear, it was custo-

mary to present it with another gift, called *Tannfé*, sometimes consisting of a bondsman, or serf, of the same age as the child. Thus it is related in the Saga, that the serf Kack was given to Haakon Jarl, in *Tannfé*, and that he had been born the same night as the Jarl.

Several of these customs fell into disuse on the introduction of the new religion, as being incompatible with Christian baptism. But naming a child after its ancestors continued to be customary, though many preferred to name it after the saints.

It frequently happened that children were not brought up in their parents' house. Thus chieftains often left their children to some one or other of their trusty subjects to rear. It was considered as a mark of friendship for a man to bring up another's child; but, at the same time, as a proof of inferiority. Many places in the Sagas speak of those who rear a child for another person as "lesser men." It was the custom on receiving the foster-child for its adopted father to place it on his knee; it was then called its foster-father's *knesetningr*, on whom devolved the same duty of seeing the child properly brought up as if he had been its own father.

Moreover, when a child was brought up at home, it was mostly left to the care of some one or other of the people belonging to the house (where the parents happened to be wealthy people); in its early years to one of the women, who was called the child's foster-mother; later on, if it was a boy, to one of the men, who was then named the child's foster-father. The Sagas record several

instances of the tender affection that has existed reciprocally between foster-parents and their adopted children during the whole course of their lives.

These customs, by the way, with reference to foster-children continued to exist after the introduction of Christianity.

Though there is no question that the old Northmen laid great stress on the necessity of bringing up their children so that they should become healthy and hardy men, they by no means neglected, where the parents were wealthy and powerful, to provide for the child's comfort and pleasure in its infancy. Cradles are mentioned as being used, as well as costly toys of gold and silver. The children of kings or chieftains, says the Saga, used to play with rings of gold in the "high seat," while the children of the serfs gambolled on the floor.

Bodily excellence was the chief object in view in the bringing up of children in the pagan times, but this by no means implied that mental culture was wholly set aside. Bodily and mental exercises were included under one head, *iþrótt*. The most important of these, which a well-educated youth deemed it the greatest honour to acquire, consisted of bodily exercises, such as being able to use any kind of weapon, to be a proficient in sword exercise, to throw a spear, to shoot with a bow, to ride, swim, to run on "ski" (a kind of snow-skate), row, wrestle, to work in wood and in metals; to which may be added the exercise of hunting hounds, training falcons or hawks, and skill in playing upon the harp.

Some of them were so skilful that they could shift their weapons from one hand to the other during the fiercest encounter, and use the left hand, either for thrust or blow, with the same facility as they could the right; others could throw two spears at one time; while others could play with three small swords in such a manner that one was constantly in the air, while the other two were held in either hand by the haft, or could walk on the blades of the oars while the boat was being rowed at full speed.

Mental accomplishments comprised a knowledge of Runes, some skill in the art of poetry, acquaintance with the laws and the old religious and historical myths, eloquence, &c., and proficiency in foreign languages. To these was added, after the introduction of Christianity, proficiency in reading, or sometimes in writing, and especially an acquaintance with one or other of the natural sciences, which became more and more known to the Northmen after the country had become Christianized, such as astronomy, geography, natural history, theology, medicine, &c.

The education of girls had especial reference to those accomplishments which in course of time would adapt them to become able housewives, such as sewing, embroidery, weaving, and such-like occupations; sometimes they were brought up to be physicians. Towards the end of the pagan era, at least, it was considered a monstrous thing for females to have anything to do with manly exercises, or with weapons; from which circumstance there is good reason to suppose, as appears by the old

Eddas, that in remote ages single women, in their unmarried condition, had been in the habit of devoting their time to warfare, in which case they were held in repute as being individuals of a higher order, as a corporeal manifestation of Odin's servants, the Valkyrjer.

The education of youth in the olden times seems by no means to have been of a severe character. Indeed, many instances quoted in the old Saga lead one to suppose that the male youth grew up to be very self-willed, and that they were in general remarkably unruly and averse to constraint. Frequent mention is made of practical jokes which the rising generation of lads played, both on their parents and on the servant-folk, which not unfrequently resulted in fatal consequences.

Some instances are recorded, on the other hand, of persons who passed their youth in an unnatural state of idleness. Such as these might constantly be seen crouching over the fire, rolling themselves in the ashes, eating ashes, and neither caring to employ themselves in anything useful, nor to keep themselves in a state of cleanliness. They would lie in the way of the domestic servants, who would ridicule them, and call them contemptuous names, such as "blockheads," or "cinder biters." Frequently, however, they would eventually emerge from this slothful state, and become notorious for manly prowess or mental excellence. Thus, an instance is recorded of the renowned Norwegian hero, Starkad, who, till he was twelve years old, used constantly to lie in the ashes, and bite them between his teeth. His foster-

brother, Vikar, was the first to rouse him up from this state of lethargy. He gave him decent clothes and weapons, after which every one was astonished at his more than ordinary strength, and subsequently he became known far and wide as a distinguished warrior and Skald.

It is related of another chieftain's son, Thorstein Thorgnysson, in Namdal, that, till he was grown up, he would lie full length on the floor, with the fire on one side of him, and a large ash-heap on the other, so that the people in the house used to stumble over his legs. Contrary to the expectation of every one, he asked permission to follow his brother on a Viking expedition. It was granted, whereupon he rose up from the floor, washed and dressed himself, and subsequently distinguished himself as a great warrior.

It is further recorded of Odd Arngeirsson, of Iceland, that he was very idle and slothful in his early youth, and that he, too, would lie by the fire and bite cinders. It happened, on one occasion, that his father and brother Thorgils had lost their way in a heavy snow-storm, as they were seeing after the cattle. Whereupon Odd went out to search for them. After some time he found them both lying dead, having been killed by a monstrous white bear, which was lying over his prey. Odd slew the bear, brought it home, and ate it. "By killing the bear," he said, "he had avenged his father's death, and by eating it, his brother's." Subsequently he became dangerous and implacable, and frequently had "Berserks-gang." \*

\* The old Norwegian name for *delirium tremens*.



It seems especially to have been the belief amongst the old Northmen that an indolent animal sort of existence, such as in the instances alluded to above, required a speedy development of physical power, but at the same time that it left behind ineffaceable traces, which were visible in after years, in the person of any one who had lived such a life. It was considered, too, by the parents, to be a dire misfortune for their son to adopt this course of living.

The introduction of Christianity did not bring about any remarkable revolution in the educational system of youth during the first few centuries, except, perhaps, in the case of those who were destined for the clerical profession, the instruction and discipline of whom devolved upon the clergy. It was not till a later period, when public schools—an institution that appears to have been entirely unknown in the days of paganism—were established in connection with cathedral churches and monasteries, that the education of the future clergy became more than formerly the care of the State, or rather of the spiritual orders of society; while from this date, at the same time, the monasteries became frequently used as seminaries, where the higher classes of society sent their children to be instructed, whether they were destined to undertake any religious office or not. In Norway, too, as in other countries, convents were doubtless resorted to by children of the opposite sex, where they might be instructed in all womanly accomplishments.

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## CHAPTER II.

## WEDLOCK.

AMONGST the Northmen, as with all other offshoots of the Germanic race, there existed a freedom in the social intercourse of the sexes, between the young and old, the married and the unmarried—a liberty that took its source from the honourable and highly respected position ascribed to women in society. Opportunities frequently presented themselves for men and women to form a preliminary acquaintance with each other, based, of course, on reciprocal inclinations, which might subsequently result in marriage. As, for instance, at banquets, where it was customary for men and women to drink with each other, and where the latter always served as cup-bearers; or at games, where females were often present as spectators; or at assemblies, where they frequently accompanied their relatives. Thus the young men had frequent opportunities of mixing with the opposite sex. Neither was the parental house closed to a young man, who wished to improve the acquaintance that had begun at one of these chance meetings, so long as he conducted himself in a becoming manner, and did not do anything to compromise the girl's fair fame. A game which was somewhat similar to draughts (*vide* p. 165) afforded frequent opportunities for confidential conversation between the lovers, for it was a game much in vogue, and

a general favourite with the youth of either sex. Young men who were endowed with intellectual attainments of a higher order, did not neglect the singing of verses as a means of ingratiating themselves into favour with a young girl; although such love-songs (called in the old language *mansöngsvísur*, from *man*, a girl) were not unfrequently looked on with suspicion by the girl's parents, especially if they entertained any idea that the minstrel was not quite in earnest in his suit. Moreover, by verses of this character the relation between the maiden and the bard not unfrequently became the common talk, and thus suitors with more honourable intentions were deterred from coming to the house. Added to this, it seems that the contents of these *mansöngsvísur* were frequently of rather a loose nature, and were thus offensive both to the maiden herself and to her family.

It is, doubtless, owing to this circumstance that the old Icelandic laws strictly forbade the composition of such kinds of verses, under penalty of outlawry.

The mutual feelings, however, which such intercourse as that described above may have awakened in the breasts of the young people, by no means always resulted in marriage. In this the father, by authority, had the deciding voice.

Young men, however, especially if they had arrived at years of discretion, were at perfect liberty to choose whom they pleased for a partner. But when, as was usually the case, they consulted their parents, or older relations, or guardians, they voluntarily made themselves subor-

dinate to the more world-wise prudence and sagacity of their elders. Thus in *Njaals Saga*, Njaal proposes a marriage for his son. "I have thought on a marriage for thee," he says, "if thou wilt follow my advice." "That will I," replies Helge; "for I know that thou both canst and wilt counsel me well."

According to the ideas of the old Northmen, a man ought not in marriage only to obey the dictates of his heart, but also, and especially, seek to secure and retain an independent and honourable position for the future; and naturally, in such momentous calculations as these, young men were very glad to have recourse to the experience and calmer opinions of their elders, rather than trust to their own passionate feelings.

Women, however, especially in the pagan times, were far more strictly under their father's control; for not only could a girl not contract any lawful marriage without the consent of her father or natural protector, but she could even be compelled by these to marry entirely against her inclinations. Numerous instances are mentioned in the *Sagas*, where the father has decided upon a marriage for his daughter, not only without consulting her at all about the matter beforehand, but even in direct opposition to her declared inclinations—a proceeding which naturally caused many an unhappy union.

If a girl married without the consent of her parents, her father or relations could disinherit her and her offspring; and the man who had made her his wife without obtaining their consent, was liable to be punished for

abduction. It is, however, by no means intended to be implied that parents always exercised their power, which the laws and old customs fully authorized them to do, in its full severity. On the contrary, several instances are recorded of parents not only taking their wife and daughter into their counsel beforehand, when a matrimonial scheme was on the *tapis*, but even of occasionally leaving the subject of marriage entirely to their daughter's free choice. Such instances were, however, exceptions and not the rule.

If the girl's father were dead, her brothers, if she had any, became her natural guardians; and in all matters connected with her marriage the authority and rights of a father devolved upon them, or on the nearest male relative.

The individual who could dispose of a woman in marriage was called *Giptingarmaðr*. Only in one instance could one woman dispose of another in marriage, and that was where the latter had neither father nor brothers. Then her mother, in conjunction with the nearest male relatives, might take the necessary steps for promoting her marriage.

A widow had this liberty, that she could not be compelled either by her father or relations to enter upon any new marriage; but, on the other hand, she could not marry without the consent of her father, or brother, or of her sons, if she had any.

Some of the Norwegian laws ascribed a similar right to a maiden who had become an inheritor of property, and

was fifteen years of age, as they permitted her to marry with whomsoever she pleased, with the advice, however, of her nearest relatives both on her father's and mother's side.

The accomplishments on which the parties concerned laid the most stress were:—on the part of the woman, good birth and respectable relations; high mindedness and aptness in the management of household affairs; wealth; and, finally, good looks and a suitable age. On the part of the man they were:—good birth, an independent position, martial exploits, and a comely person.

When a man, after his own free will, or following the advice of his older relations, had selected the woman he purposed to pay his addresses to, the formal wooing (*bónorð*) took place. The suitor (*biðill*), accompanied by his father or by some of his nearest relations or particular friends (and in case he was a man of rank, by a suitable retinue), repaired to the father or the guardian of the object of his aspirations. This courting excursion was termed *bónorðsför*. The suitor himself was generally present on such occasions, except when he was a person of princely rank, in which case he would woo the daughter of some foreign potentate by means of ambassadors. But although, as a rule, the suitor himself was present, it was not he in general who had to lead the conversation and demand the woman in marriage. This duty devolved upon his nearest relative, or most intimate friend. The spokesman thereupon addressed himself to the woman's father or guardian, and made known the suitor's errand, taking

care to enumerate all his good qualities, and to mention any other circumstance which might conduce to bring about the marriage. If these preliminary arrangements were well received, they then proceeded to discuss matters more closely connected with the marriage. And here, too, the spokesman usually conducted the business in the suitor's interests, after previous consultation with him.

These subjects of discussion partly referred to matters of economy; partly to the time and place at which the wedding should take place.

Marriage was, in truth, a regular matter of business with the old Northmen, in which a certain outlay was made by both of the parties concerned, in order to ensure the union a certain basis of property on which it might rest secure. Hence the name *brúðkaup* (literally, bride-dealing).

Consequently, the settlement of the conditions of this bargaining was a matter of the last importance. The money which the woman's father or guardian furnished, on the one side, was called *heimanfylgja*. On the other hand, the man had to furnish from his property the so-named *tílgjöf*, a sum which, according to law, was to equal half the value of the *heimanfylgja*; for which reason it is termed in the laws a "third part increase;" or as the expression more frequently occurs, that the woman's dowry "should be increased a third part in the man's property." The husband's settlement, in case he died before his wife, was to fall to her together with her dowry;

but if the wife died first, her husband then had only to disburse her dowry to her inheritors.

The so-called *mundr* seems to have been an essentially different thing from the settlement. Properly speaking, it consisted of the amount which the husband had paid to the woman's father, or to the person who had disposed of her in marriage, as purchase-money; and it always formed part and parcel of her property. Everything, however, which was forthcoming from the husband's side in the shape of property or money was usually called under one head, *mundr*. The *mundr* was, according to the older Gulathing's law, to consist at least of the value of twelve "örers"\* of silver. Besides this, on the day after the wedding, the husband had to give his wife the so-called *bekkjargjöf*, or *morgungjöf*,† termed also *línfé*.

The dimensions of all these mutual disbursements had to be settled and accurately arranged during the wooing, in the hearing of the witnesses of either party. It was thus usual for the spokesman, especially if he were the suitor's father, near relative, foster-father, or guardian, and if the suitor did not possess any property of his own, or was a householder, to notify what he was prepared to give in the shape of property or lands, in case the marriage should take place. Finally, it was also frequently the custom on this occasion to declare, that, provided the newly married couple should have children, their joint property (*félag*) should accrue to them; which meant, that whatever profit

\* The öre was the eighth of an ounce.

† The bench or morning gift.



their joint property should yield under the husband's management should be considered as their common estate, and, in case of the death of either of the parents, should be equally divided between the survivor and the heirs of the deceased. This was called *helmingarfélag*.

The entire arrangements with reference to matters of economy were termed *festakaupmál*, or betrothal contract.

With respect to the time when the actual marriage should take place, arrangements were made according to circumstances. Sometimes it would be postponed only for a few months after the betrothal, or even for a shorter time; but sometimes it was delayed for some years. This latter was usually the case when the suitor wished to travel in foreign lands before he married; or if he had important business matters to arrange that might require a lengthened absence from home. Three years, however, seems to have been the longest date to which the marriage could be delayed. The woman was said to *sitja í festum* during this period, or to remain betrothed. If the man did not make his appearance at the preconcerted time to celebrate the wedding, the whole affair was at an end, and the woman was free to marry with any one else. According to the old Norwegian laws twelve months was the longest time to which the woman's guardian could postpone the marriage against the will of the man. The marriage ceremony generally took place at the bride's home; only in exceptional cases was it held at the bridegroom's house.

When all these preliminary conditions had been duly

arranged between the woman's guardian and the suitor's spokesman, in the hearing of legally appointed witnesses, then the *festar* or betrothal proper took place. After the compact had been agreed upon in the hearing of the witnesses, the suitor advanced towards the woman's guardian, who gave him her hand (*handsal*), and betrothed the woman to him, while the parties on either side declared themselves to be witnesses of the betrothal.

The Icelandic "Graagaas" has preserved the formulary which was made use of on such occasions:—"We declare ourselves witnesses," should the man say who engaged himself to the woman, "that thou N. N. bindest me in lawful betrothal, and that with taking hold of hands thou promisest me (*handsalar mér*) the dowry (*heimanfylgja*), and engagest to fulfil and observe the whole of the compact between us, which has been notified in the hearing of witnesses without duplicity or cunning, as a real and authorized compact."

During the whole of this ceremony the woman who was given away took a silent and impassive part, in case she was a maiden. But if she were a widow, then she betrothed herself away, though at the same time all the preliminary conditions were arranged between her trustee or guardian and the suitor's spokesman in the ordinary way. In case a maiden possessed any private property of her own, there is no doubt but that she betrothed herself away in the same manner as a widow did.

The customs alluded to above with reference to the wooing and betrothal seem to have been of very great

antiquity in Norway, and from thence to have been introduced into Iceland. They continued, too, in the main, unchanged during the whole of the Christian middle ages, only with this perceptible difference, that Christianity, by imparting a more religious sense to the rite of marriage, gradually liberated the woman from a great deal of that constraint by which, in the days of paganism, she had been bound in the matter of choosing a husband; a freedom which is to be explained from the fact that the Roman Catholic Church looked on matrimony as a sacrament, and little by little obtained the control over all matrimonial affairs.

Both in the "Frostathing's" and "Eidsivathing's" Christian laws, which date from the end of the twelfth to the beginning of the thirteenth century, a marriage is declared to be illegal where the woman had expressly, in the presence of witnesses, opposed herself to it; and in Archbishop Jon's Christian law, at the close of the thirteenth century, it is forbidden, in accordance with God's law (that is, the canonical law), to give away any maiden or woman in betrothal contrary to her will. In all these various codes, therefore, the consent of the woman is considered essential in order to make the marriage legal. Truly, the last-named code adds, that "neither is any marriage legal that has been entered into without the consent of the woman's father, or of him who acted in *loco parentis*;" but even in this respect a very important change took place, to the advantage of the woman, as appears by an enactment in King Magnus Lagaböter's laws, viz.:

“that if the man who arranged the marriage on the woman’s behalf refuses to allow her to marry with her equal, she can marry him all the same after having taken counsel of her other relatives, and after their consent has been obtained,” constituting in fact a very important limitation to the power of the trustee or guardian over the woman.

It appears also to have been very early assumed, that if a girl wished to become a nun, or to withdraw into a convent, she was not obliged to contract any matrimonial connection contrary to her will. At least, it stands in the Icelandic law that “no father can compel his daughter to marry, if she wishes to take the veil.” But it certainly states in the “Frostathing’s” laws, that if a woman is desirous of taking the vow, the bishop may not consecrate her without the consent of her trustee or guardian ; a decision probably made not so much for the purpose of throwing difficulties in the way of her entering a convent, as of guarding against the contingency of her bequeathing too great a portion of her property to the convent, to the detriment of her heirs.

After the introduction of Christianity, an express provision was made, whereby the betrothal of those who were near of kin was forbidden. Marriage between very near relations, such as between brothers and sisters, between parents and children, and such like, had been considered, even from the oldest pagan ages, to be impermissible ; but the Christianity of the middle ages, as is well known, proceeded much farther in this direction ; for it declared

a marriage between relatives in the seventh degree, and between connections in the fifth degree, to be incestuous; added to which, certain conditions of spiritual or baptismal relationship were included under the same ban. A very careful acquaintance, therefore, with these restrictions became now in a high degree necessary to guard against the betrothal being pronounced unlawful, in case the contracting parties were found to fall within the degrees of relationship, or against the divorcement of the married couple, if the ceremony of marriage had already taken place.

The exchanging of rings between the betrothed did not form, as far as can be learnt from the ancient Sagas and laws, any essential part in the ceremony of betrothal amongst the old Northmen, neither in pagan nor in Christian times. Mention, undoubtedly, is often made of such an exchange of rings taking place; but this was only done as a kind of memorial gift, and no importance was attached to it. The custom of the betrothal ring was first introduced into Norway at a much later date, in imitation of that in vogue in southern countries.

Generally, the woman was termed by different titles, corresponding with the different conditions that existed between her and her intended husband. So long as only a mutual agreement had taken place between the two lovers, she was called the man's *hugdarkona*, or sweetheart. When, however, the suitor had obtained her father's or her guardian's consent, and before the betrothal had formally taken place, she was called his *heitkona*, or

promised wife ; and when the betrothal ceremony was at length over, she was called his *festarkona*, or his betrothed.

The betrothal once lawfully concluded, neither of the contracting parties could break off the engagement without incurring punishment and disgrace.

The older "Gulathing's" law awards the penalty of outlawry to the person who should break off the betrothal, whether that person were the woman's father, or whether it were either of the contracting parties themselves. In the last two cases the guilty party was stigmatized by a dishonourable name. If any one carried off another man's betrothed, he, too, was punished with outlawry ; and the same penalty was attached to the woman herself if she had been a consenting party to the abduction. But both in the "Frostathing's" law, and in Archbishop Jon's Christian Code, it was determined, that if a woman who was betrothed should have a child by her future husband before the actual marriage had taken place, it should be considered to be legitimate and entitled to inherit. It is uncertain whether this custom prevailed in the days of paganism.

The last formality necessary to make the marriage lawful and valid was the wedding, called, in the old language, *bruðskaup* and *bruðlaup*. The first of these titles, which is undoubtedly the most ancient and the most peculiar, had especial reference to the civil part of the ceremony, namely, to the final conclusion of the compact (*kaup*) alluded to above in the ceremony of betrothal. The latter

apparently takes its origin from the circumstance that the ceremony caused a large concourse of persons (*hlaup*, a concourse) to assemble, not only because custom and usage required that it should be celebrated by merriment and feasting, but also because the presence of witnesses—the more the better—was essential to the consummation of the marriage itself.

At the time appointed at the betrothal, the bridegroom repaired with his friends, both male and female, who had been previously invited, to the bride's house, where her relations and friends of either sex—also after previous invitation—were already assembled. If the wedding took place in the bridegroom's house (which, as above said, was but seldom the case), the bride was accompanied thither by her father or guardian, together with her relations and friends.

According to ancient custom, the parties present arranged themselves in a certain order. On one bench, which ran the whole length of the room, sat the bridegroom and his male retinue, the bridegroom sitting in the middle; on the other bench, opposite to them, the father or guardian of the bride, together with the male guests that had been invited and the people of the house, were seated, the father or guardian being in the middle; and on a cross bench, all the females, with the bride in their midst. This seat was therefore called *bruðbekkr*, or the bride's bench. The bride wore a peculiar head-dress of linen, called the *bruðarlín*; hence the expression which is occasionally to be found in old verses about a bride—

“*ganga und líní*,” that is to “deck one’s self with linen,” for the purpose of being married.

In later times, at least in Iceland, this dress consisted of a long linen cloth, hanging down from the top of the head so low that two women, named *linkonur*, bore its ends or peaks as the bride went in solemn procession to and from the bridal seat.

There is every reason for supposing that the conditions and arrangements already alluded to were again repeated and attested in the presence of the wedding guests; and that solemn toasts were drunk, in which, in the pagan days, the blessing of the gods was invoked over the newly married pair, and in Christian times, that of Christ and the saints. Thereupon the bridegroom and the bride were conducted to the same bed. With this the wedding ceremony may properly be considered to have been over, though the festivities were usually protracted for several days. This was termed “to drink to the wedding.” The Sagas make mention of weddings having lasted for seven days; sometimes, indeed, they lasted even longer than this. In Magnus Lagaböter’s law it is forbidden, under penalty of incurring a fine, to keep the festivities up longer than two days.

It is extremely probable that certain religious rites were employed in connection with the marriage, though they are nowhere expressly alluded to.

The goddesses Sjöfn, Lofn, and especially Vár, seem to have been considered to be the protecting guardians of a betrothal. Vár, it is said, heard the oaths and promises



which the young people made to each other, and took vengeance on the one who broke them. Therefore such promises were called in the remotest times *várar*, and the mutual exchange of such was called *at veitast várar*; he who broke them was termed *váravargr*. It further appears that the marriage was solemnly consecrated by invoking the goddess *Vár*. It is mentioned, moreover, in the Sagas, that prayers were offered to the gods for the success of the marriage. Still it is pretty evident that the pagan Northmen, at least towards the end of the pagan age, looked on marriage principally as a civil contract, and therefore legal formalities figured most in the performance of the ceremony.

Thus matters continued till far into the Christian era, and mention is first made in Archbishop Jon's Code, at the close of the thirteenth century, of its being incumbent on the bridal pair to have the ceremony performed in church by a priest, before the wedding festivities could be held.

It is difficult to determine the age at which the old Northmen most generally married. Relying on the words of Tacitus, it might be supposed that they had attained a mature age before they married—namely, that men seldom married before they were thirty, women before they were twenty years of age. As regards the former, certainly the manner of life pursued in very ancient times implies the improbability of their being able to marry at any young age; for it was customary for a man's youth to be passed on Vikingr expeditions, or on commercial

journeys, and not till he had travelled far and wide, and had gained both wealth and renown, did it ever enter into his head to settle down quietly in his fatherland and become a paterfamilias. But there are so many instances recorded in the Saga of women marrying before they were twenty years old, that the custom must have been far from general. Thus girls were given away in their fifteenth, and even in their fourteenth year; and the most ancient Norwegian laws that set the coming of age, both of men and women, at the fifteenth year, speak of such early marriages as being of quite common occurrence.

Later on, in the middle ages, they began in Norway—probably in imitation of the customs of southern countries—not only to betroth people to each other, of which either one or both were still children, but even to allow the marriage ceremony to be duly performed. One can perceive to what an extent this irrational custom must have been carried from Archbishop Jon's Christian Code, where it is declared to be permissible to betroth children that are seven years old, but with this reservation, the actual marriage was not to take place till the boy was fourteen and the girl twelve years of age. Doubtless such unions only took place between people of very high rank, and were looked on most probably either as a means of political aggrandizement, or of acquiring great wealth.

Only the marriage that was concluded with the formal wedding and preliminary betrothal was declared to be a perfectly legal one; only by it did the woman become a married woman (*eiginkona*) and wife (*húsfreyja*), with the

full enjoyment of all the rights and privileges attached to that honourable title ; only by such a union were the children considered legitimate, and consequently entitled to inherit property. Certainly, if the father had acknowledged his illegitimate child, it could claim his rights—that is, his personal rights—or assume the rank to which his social position entitled him, but it could not assume the right to inherit.

A wedding without the preliminary betrothal was termed *skyndibrúðhlaup*, or hasty marriage ; *lausabrúðhlaup*, or loose marriage. A wedding of this description betokened that the union of which it was the seal was of itself unlawful. Children that were the issue of such marriages could not inherit.

If connubial intercourse took place between the betrothed pair before the actual wedding came off, the woman's relatives could demand a penalty of the man for such offence ; and the fruit of this intercourse, if there were any, was not considered legitimate, neither could it inherit, unless the wedding subsequently took place, or unless the death of the man within a twelvemonth of the betrothal were the cause of its not taking place.

Connubial intercourse without preliminary betrothal or wedding was termed concubinage. The woman, in this case, was called the man's *frilla*, and the children which were born from this connection, *frillubörn*, or illegitimate children, or *laungetin börn*, that is clandestinely born children. To take a woman to concubine was called *at taka konu frillutaki*. If the concubine were a serf or

bondwoman, a still greater stigma was attached to the children, in which case they were designated *ambáttar-börn*, or "serf-born." The terms on which such a connection was entered upon—such as its duration, for instance—depended on the man's pleasure, but the children were not entitled to inherit. According to the old Norwegian laws, a simple peasant (*bonde*) could not give the son of his *frilla* a present of greater value than twelve örens (the öre was one-eighth of an ounce in silver), but if the father were a man of higher rank, he could give it more in proportion.

The term *fylgikona* (literally, companion woman) which frequently occurs in the Sagas, must have originally meant the same as *frilla*. Later on, in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, it received a more honourable import, as it was applied to a free woman living with a man in connubial intercourse according to the terms of a formal contract, but without the observance of the usual wedding ceremonies, and especially without consecration by the Church. Connections of this kind seem to have been rather common, especially in Iceland, and dated from the time when the Church began to lay greater hindrances in the way of obtaining a divorce than had formerly been the case. This connection could be dissolved at the wish of either of the parties, or in accordance with the terms that had been previously agreed on, without the intervention of the Church, a result which was not in accordance with Christian views, and could not be applied to marriages proper. The clergy, moreover, themselves afforded fre-

quent illustrations of loose and highly immoral connections of this description, after that a life of celibacy had been strictly enforced upon them.

The *fylgikona* frequently occupied the position of housewife, and it appears that, through the instrumentality of the clergy, means were found to evade the laws relating to children which were the fruit of such connection, by which the right of bequeathing a certain portion of property to them by will was fully recognized.

Children that were born in prostitution, or from common harlots, or from parents within the forbidden degree, were still less entitled to inherit.

From very remote times there was a way open to the father by which he could get his illegitimate children recognized and fully entitled to inherit, and this was the so-called *ættleiðing*, *at leiðai ætt*, *at leiða til arfs*. To this arrangement, however, the consent of the legal heir nearest of kin was necessary. The adoption of such children was, both in older and in later times, connected with the observance of several formalities, which the ancient laws accurately described. According to these, the custom to be observed was as follows:—The person who adopted a child, after the consent of the heir next in kin had been obtained, had to brew at least three barrels of ale, for a banquet, and slaughter a three-year-old ox. Out of the skin of its right fore-leg he was to make a shoe, and lay it by the vessel in which the ale stood, and from which the guests helped themselves by dipping in drinking-horns or bowls. Thereupon, in the presence of

the invited guests, he who adopted had to put his foot into the shoe ; next, the child adopted, and finally the heir, or heirs, if there were more than one. The adopter had also to declare that by this deed he placed the adopted child in possession of all those privileges which would have belonged to it had it been born in lawful wedlock. If any of the heirs were under age, then those that were of age had to consent, on the part of these, to the arrangement, holding them meanwhile in their arms, while they put their foot in the shoe. The averment of the persons present, and the shoe that had been used on the occasion, were considered to be sufficient proofs of the fact of the adoption. The adopted person had to advertise his adoption every twentieth year, till such time as the inheritance in question fell to him. The older "Frosta-thing's" law contains, in addition, the provision that no unmarried man might adopt a woman, nor a woman a bachelor.

The ceremony described above, as used on such occasions, was undoubtedly very ancient, and took its origin in the days of paganism. In the law of Magnus Lagaböter the ceremony assumed a more religious form. In this it is prescribed that the adopter, the adopted, and the heirs of the former should all of them repair to the church door, and there should each lay hold of one missal, or testament, whilst the adopter gave notice of the adoption he made.

Not only could fathers make their illegitimate children inheritors by adoption, but lawfully born brothers or

sisters could also legitimize their illegitimate brothers and sisters, or more distant relatives, or even persons who were not united to them by any tie of relationship, provided that the nearest lawful heir gave his consent thereto in the prescribed way.

Although there are no traces that a plurality of wives was expressly forbidden in the heathen legislature of the Northmen, it is, however, tolerably certain that such a practice, in its literal sense, was never general either in Norway or in Iceland. Certain royal personages afforded a few peculiar instances of having indulged in a plurality of wives, namely, King Hjörleif, the "woman lover," and King Harald, the "fair-haired;" and yet even with these it is as difficult to form a correct judgment as to the proper nature of their connubial connections, as it is with regard to King Harold Haardraade, the Christian king of Norway, who, as is well known, had two wives at the same time—Elizabeth, the daughter of the Russian king, and Thora Thorbergsdatter, daughter of a Norwegian chieftain—both of whom seem to have enjoyed the rights and title of Queen.

In heathen, as well as in Christian times, it was, undoubtedly, customary for a man to have only one wife; though, on the other hand, it cannot be denied that it was very usual for him to have, in addition to his wife, one or more concubines, generally of low origin, or taken from the rank of serfs.

The concubine often took up her abode in the man's house; but it was sometimes the case, when the wife was

rather high-spirited, and could not endure the constant presence of a rival in her husband's affections, that this latter had a dwelling allotted to her in the neighbourhood of the house, where she managed her own household affairs, and where she usually had the children the husband had begotten by her living with her. No cloak was laid on such connections either in the pagan or in the older Christian times. With reference to their mutual position, the wife and the concubine were termed *eljur* (rivals); and where the husband had the concubine in his own house in company with his wife, she was *arinelja*, or rival at the hearth.

From the above it is apparent that in a description of the laws of marriage among the old Northmen, there can only be mention made of the mutual relations that existed between husband and wife, their privileges as regarded themselves, their children, and their house.

But, notwithstanding that among the old Northmen the woman was in a manner purchased by her husband, and in most instances had not a voice in the matter, it by no means follows therefrom that in her position as wife she could be regarded as her husband's absolute property, to be dealt with by him according to his own will and pleasure. The wife was, and was called, a free woman; but she stood under her husband's protection; and his lawful authority over her, especially during the days of paganism, was in many respects of very wide extent. As the husband, in case he found his wife to be unfaithful to him, had a right to kill her paramour, so there can be no question at all that he had a right in the same instance



to kill his guilty wife. Further, it may be concluded from the older "Frostathing's" law, that a husband was at liberty to kill his wife, provided it came to his knowledge that she was seeking to encompass his life. For it expressly states that the woman who either herself has killed her husband, or has instigated some other man to kill him, is to be handed over to the disposal of the relatives of the deceased, who might kill or maim her according to their will and pleasure.

This privilege it appears, however, was seldom made use of; as the man in such cases generally contented himself with a divorce. In no other case than those above named had the husband power over his wife's life. The Sagas adduce only one instance of a husband killing his wife for a minor offence. Hallbjörn Oddsson cut off the head of his wife Hallgerd for refusing to fly with him from her father's house. Hallbjörn, however, immediately after fell a victim to the vengeance of her relatives.

More frequent mention is made of men giving their wives blows; and yet this was generally the case only for some grave faults, or else was done in a moment of provocation; and even then it seems that such treatment was very ill received on the part of the wife, who not unfrequently, even after the lapse of a considerable time, avenged herself, when a favourable opportunity presented itself, for the affront. The older "Gulathing's" law forbids a man to strike his wife at a feast or banquet, under a penalty to her of the same amount as that which would have accrued to him had the affront been offered to

her by another person than himself; and should he offer such violence to her three times, she was then at liberty to quit him, taking with her both dower and settlement. To lay violent hands upon the weaker sex, however, was always considered by the old Northmen to be so unmanly a proceeding, that no brave man ever made himself guilty in this respect, except under the influence of the greatest aggravation.

Some people have maintained that it was the law in the remotest ages of antiquity, or at least the prevalent custom amongst the Northmen, that the wife should follow her husband in death, be burnt upon the same pyre, and be interred with him.

This assertion, however, rests mainly for its authority upon the description of certain Germanic races by foreign writers; partly on an incident recorded in the Sagas of Odd Munk Olaf Tryggvesson about the Swedish Queen Sigrid Storraade, who separated from her husband, King Erik Seiersæl, because it was the law of the land that the wife should submit to be interred with her husband in case he died first, and she knew that King Erik had purchased the victory over his relative, Styrbjörn, by promising himself to Odin in ten years time.

But as regards the first of these testimonies, it is necessary to guard against transferring everything that is recorded about the customs of the Germanic races to the old Northmen, even supposing the writers themselves to have been trustworthy; while the other statement is taken from one of the most unreliable of all the Sagas the

old Norwegian-Icelandic literature can possibly produce. Moreover, it has but little or no weight if it be not confirmed by the testimony of other Sagas ; and this is so far from being the case, that frequent instances are found in these of women, not only in Norway, but also in the other Scandinavian countries, marrying a second time, after the decease of their first husband. The assertion of the obligation of women to allow themselves to be interred with their deceased husbands must therefore be considered to be unfounded.

But that some women voluntarily put an end to their existence, in order to follow their lovers or husbands in death, is quite another matter. Thus in the old Eddas it is related that Brynhild Budlesdatter killed herself on her lover's (Sigurd Fafnersbane's) pyre ; and that Thyri, the queen of Olaf Tryggvesson, starved herself to death from grief at her husband's death ; and further, that Bergthora, the magnanimous wife of Njaal of Iceland, rejected all offers of surviving her husband, declaring as follows :—  
“ Young was I when I married with Njaal, and I have promised him that one destiny should overtake us both.”

These are but beautiful traits of womanly devotion to their lovers or husbands, which, taken in connection with the numerous instances recorded in the Sagas of wives dying from grief when their husbands were taken from them, form bright spots in the matrimonial life of the pagan Northmen—a life, however, which is by no means deficient in its dark points.

Amongst other privileges, the right of the husband to

exchange, bequeath, or give away his wife (in so far, however, as it can be proved that this right ever had any actual existence, and was not, at least, dependent on the consent of the wife) deserves prominent notice. The most definite authority for the insinuation that such a privilege ever existed in the pagan days rests upon a story that is to be found in "Landnamabok."

Two of Iceland's "Landnamsmen," Illuge Röde and Holm-Starre, exchanged their possessions with one another, including their wives and movable effects. Illuge got Holm-Starre's wife, Jorunn; but his former wife, Sigrid, hung herself in the temple, as she would have nothing to do with the affair.

There is every reason to suppose that this proposed exchange of wives was made without previously obtaining the consent of the women in question; but the instance is the only one of its kind recorded that the old Sagas have handed down to us; and the whole transaction may possibly have been brought about by special causes which are unknown to us; so that it is by no means a consequence that it was based upon any legally authorized privilege.

On the other hand, there are trustworthy accounts of a husband giving away his wife while he was yet alive to another man who had loved her; and of a husband, shortly before his death, consigning his surviving partner to some great friend who had done him a particular service, or for whom he entertained a very high regard. But in these instances it is ascertained either that the husband had previously been aware of an attachment existing

between the two parties concerned, and therefore the wife's consent followed as a matter of course ; or that the gift was only made with the presupposition that neither the wife herself nor her relatives had anything against the new connection, in which case, therefore, it can only be considered as a recommendation.

Mention is also made of a betrothed woman being given away by her lover, in which there is no reason for supposing that any of the privileges to which she and her relatives were entitled were infringed upon.

The compulsory cession of wives, however, which was not of rare occurrence in the days of paganism, and which took place when one man challenged another to a duel, and staked his wife on the issue, was of a totally different character.\*

Many a man who did not feel competent to fight such a duel with a more skilful opponent, gave up his wife without any contest ; and fathers and brothers seem to have acted in the same manner with their daughters or sisters. Whatever had thus been gained was considered to be the victor's lawful acquisition, on which no subsequent demand could be made from the other side without the issue of another challenge.

As may be supposed, a barbarous custom like this, which sapped the very roots of all conjugal happiness, was immediately abolished on the introduction of Christianity, from which date the transfer of wives gradually fell into

\* These duels were called *Holmgang*, from being frequently fought on "holms," or rocky islets.—Ed.

disuse, as being manifestly at variance with the spirit of the new religion.

Finally, the authority of a husband over his wife manifested itself in this, that she could not, except with his permission, absent herself from his house for any lengthened period, not even on the plea of visiting her nearest relatives.

The wife, on her side, could demand to be properly and suitably maintained by her husband. He had not only to provide her with everything necessary for the management of the household, but had also to furnish her with clothes and ornaments, so that both at home and abroad, in assemblies and at feasts, she could appear in a manner suitable to her rank in life. This latter provision was, indeed, not unfrequently expressly alluded to at the betrothal, in cases where a maiden who did not possess much means of her own was to be married to some man of wealth, who, in other respects, was scarcely considered to be a suitable match for her.

If any affront were offered to the wife, her husband was bound to avenge it, or make a complaint about it, exactly as if the affront had been offered to himself. He had to receive amends on her behalf equally as in the case had he himself been the aggrieved party. "Every man owes the same duty to his wife that he owes to himself," says the old law. And not only so, but in case she committed an offence against another person, he had to make restitution for her acts.

In case of unfaithfulness on the part of the husband,

provided it did not lead to any open abuse of the wife, or to her desertion by her husband, she had no right, according to the old heathen legislature, to demand any compensation from her husband. True enough, the old "Frostathing's" law has a provision that, should a married man commit fornication, either within or without his house, he should pay a fine of three marks to his wife, for each time the offence was committed. No traces, however, of a wife possessing this privilege are to be found in any other old Norwegian laws; so that it probably takes its origin from the days of Christianity, when the clergy used their utmost endeavours to get the old laws of matrimony amended and altered to the advantage of the wife. The ecclesiastical laws, from the close of the thirteenth century, however, appear to have arrived at an equality of rights in this respect; but the civil legislature, as well as the general opinion and customs, continued to incline to the husband's side.

Both in the days of paganism and of Christianity, the husband alone possessed all rights concerning the children. It rested exclusively with him whether the child was to be nurtured or exposed, so long as the custom of exposing children was in vogue; and it was he who decided all matters relating to the marrying of the daughters. And if the wife had any voice in the matter, it was only owing to a good-natured concession on the part of her husband, and not from any privilege or right that she possessed.

As concerning the management of property, the rights

of husbands and wives undoubtedly depended upon the conditions that had been made at the betrothal. Where no special conditions had been made, the husband had uncontrolled authority over his own and his wife's property, so long as both were alive, and the marriage remained in force; still, he was forbidden to remove her property out of the country without her consent.

The wife was not permitted to make any bargains or purchases involving a larger sum than a certain value commensurate with her husband's position, which was stated in the law; otherwise the husband was at liberty to repudiate the bargain.

In case the marriage were dissolved, either by the death of one or other of the contracting parties, or by a divorce that was not occasioned through any fault on the part of the wife, the property was divided between them. And if the property had been valued at the time of marriage, it was then divided in proportion to the amount either had contributed towards the common estate; and in case their common estate had improved or increased in value, then two-thirds of such increase fell to the husband's share, and one-third to the wife's. Had any mutual arrangement been entered into by the married couple, then such had to be respected. And if their property had not been previously valued, then the wife claimed a third part of the estate, besides her clothes; and this was also the case where poor people had married, and had subsequently acquired any property.



All these provisions, as it appears, had the same reference to cases where the woman on her marriage was already in possession of property (when, for instance, she was a widow of means, or an heiress) as when she had only contributed her dowry to the common estate. There was, however, one exceptional case, where the wife possessed Odels-land.\*

In case the marriage were dissolved by death, the survivor always retained the *tilgjøf*.—*Vide* p. 22.

With reference to their domestic arrangements, it devolved upon the husband to see to everything out of the house. He had to manage the farm; all mercantile affairs, buying and selling, fell under his supervision. He, moreover, had the control of all the male servants, whether they were serfs, serving-men, or workmen; had to apportion to each his work, and to see that it was properly done; and, finally, he had to see that the buildings were kept in proper repair, and all other such matters. The wife, on the other hand, had the care of everything inside the house; all matters connected with housekeeping fell to her; the provisions were kept by her, and she had to see to the preparation and distribution of food. Therefore it was said that she had the *búrlyklar* or keys of the storerooms; which keys carried by her side were a sign of her housewifely dignity, which was occasionally deputed to her on the wedding-day. In addition

\* Odels, or allodium, denotes lands which were the absolute property of their owner, without being obliged to pay any service or acknowledgment whatever to a superior lord.—ED.

to these duties she had the superintendence of all the female servants and serf-women ; and had to see that their work in the house, such as weaving, the making of woollen goods, and such like, was properly done ; and besides this, it was incumbent on her to see that the men were properly waited upon.

The wife appears to have had an important voice in the matter of engaging serving-folk ; she, too, could reward or punish them. Yet the right of taking away the life of a serf, or of giving them their freedom, as a rule, rested with the husband alone.

It was the case, however, here, as it ever has been elsewhere, that there were not wanting women, endowed with superior abilities, and of a strong-minded, jealous disposition, who, not content with the privileges which the laws and old customs guaranteed them, encroached upon the husband's province, and acquired a decided authority over him. Those men who submitted in this way to be managed by their wives, often heard themselves ill spoken of, and were consequently regarded with contempt, if their weakness in these respects extended very far.

Divorces were undoubtedly of very common occurrence among the Northmen. Where both parties were unanimous in their wish to separate, the law appears to have laid no obstacles in their way. In such cases the wife took her departure with the property she had brought with her, or with as much more as her husband would grant her, or as had been previously agreed on, without

the observation of any further formalities. If it was only the husband who wished for a divorce, there was no impediment in the way, even though he had no legal claim on his side, provided he only gave his wife her dowry and settlement. Such a divorce, however, was undoubtedly always considered as a disgrace to the wife and her relatives, and often resulted in hostility and retaliation. But it was more difficult for the woman to get the marriage disannulled when she had no legal claim for a divorce; for if she deserted her husband without due cause, he was entitled to retain her dowry in his own hands; and this held good even in the case where she left him "with good intent"—that is to say, if she did not feel herself capable of fulfilling the duties of a housewife; which request for a divorce on the part of the woman was termed *at beiðast* (that is, to beg herself out of housekeeping); but even in this case her husband could compel her to return to his house.

It is difficult to determine with any degree of accuracy what were the legal grounds for claiming a divorce on the part of either of the married pair in the days of paganism, for the old Norwegian and Icelandic laws that have been handed down to us bear evident traces of having been adapted to the demands of the Christian religion; and in the instances recorded in the Sagas it is nearly an impossibility to distinguish between what was strictly the letter of the law, what was permissible, and, finally, what was purely voluntary.

But it appears that the husband had lawful claim to a

divorce if his wife could be proved to have been unfaithful to the marriage bed, or if she laid a plot against his life. In the first of these cases it is quite certain that the husband was entitled to retain her dowry, and it is more than probable that the same may be premised of the latter. Besides these, instances are recorded where a husband has repudiated his wife on account of her extravagance in housekeeping; or for having used improper language towards him in public meetings; or because she would not be reconciled to him; but how far these grounds for a divorce were really lawful, or how far they involved, on the part of the wife, a loss of dowry or settlement, cannot be determined. It is probable that any disobedience on the wife's part to her husband's commands was considered in those days sufficient grounds to entitle the husband to at least a reasonable claim for a divorce; a claim, too, which held equally good when the woman, owing to natural infirmities, such as sickness or old age, was no longer able to fulfil her duties as a wife; or, finally, when she proved unfruitful. But when a marriage was dissolved owing to causes for which the woman was not to be blamed, there is every probability for supposing that the husband allowed her to retain her dowry, especially if the union had proved to be a fruitless one.

A lawful ground for seeking a divorce on the woman's side was when her husband had abused her, or had struck her; or if he refused to cohabit with her for any lengthened time; or if he was physically incapable; and finally,

as it appears, if they were of different religions. In the two first-named cases it is quite clear that the woman could demand both dowry and settlement. Instances, too, are recorded of women having considered a forced marriage as good grounds for quitting their husband ; or of having threatened their husband with a divorce (and cases have occurred where the threat has actually been carried out) because he had shown himself to be a despicable individual, especially if there had been any question as to assisting his wife's friends or relatives ; or if he had committed any deed which had incurred her displeasure in a high degree. But such grounds could scarcely have been considered valid, except in the case where the husband, either from fear or from other causes, had neglected to make any complaint of his wife's conduct ; and it does not appear that she could on such grounds alone lay any claim to have her property handed over to her.

Finally, one more cause for seeking a divorce may be mentioned (which may be supposed to have been lawful for either of the married pair), and this was where one or other of them wore garments which were only adapted to, and only worn by the opposite sex. As, for instance, where a man wore a shirt that was so cut out in front that a considerable portion of the breast was exposed, or where the wife went with breeches on in which there was an entire back-piece. The trustworthy "Lardöla" Saga, which makes mention of this law, adduces some instances in which the party who wished for a divorce had cunningly availed him or herself of it ; as, for instance, that a wife

had made her husband's shirt in the manner described above, and that when he was so simple as to put it on, she had on those grounds declared herself divorced from him.

And lastly, a divorce could only be brought about on the husband's part by his leaving his wife, or by sending her away from him; or by stealing away from her in a discreditable manner, or by a formal announcement of the dissolution of the marriage, which announcement had to be made in the presence of witnesses, before whom the grounds for the divorce had to be adduced. A divorce was only perfectly legal in this latter case, and the observance of this form is enjoined in the older "Gulathing's" law.

Where the wife was the party who sought for the divorce, still greater formalities had to be observed. For instance, she was obliged to proclaim the divorce three times in three separate places, alleging at the same time her lawful reasons therefore; first, before the bed; secondly, before the principal entrance to the house; and finally, at the "Thing" (public assembly). Such was the custom in Iceland, and there is every reason to suppose that it was introduced into that country from Norway. It may, in conclusion, be noticed that a divorce in the pagan days laid no impediment in the way of either of the parties entering upon a fresh union.

The rulers of the Christian Church by degrees attempted to circumscribe the facility that had prevailed in the old pagan days amongst the Northmen of obtaining a dissolution of the marriage tie, as something that was at variance

with the spirit of Christianity. While they represented matrimony as a sacrament according to the laws of the Catholic Church, to the complete legality of which the blessing of the Church was requisite, so did they render its dissolution a matter dependent upon the Church. By the twelfth century divorce cases seem to have generally come under the jurisdiction of the bishop, on whom devolved the duty of adjudicating whether there were lawful grounds for a divorce or not. The old laws and usages respecting it fell little by little into disuse; and the clergy gradually enforced the rule that a marriage could only be legally dissolved (after the bishop concerned had pronounced sentence) where a proof of unfaithfulness on the part of either the husband or the wife had been fully established; or where they had been discovered to fall within the forbidden degrees of relationship. In the first-named of these cases both parties were forbidden to contract a new marriage without the bishop's express permission.

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### CHAPTER III.

#### DWELLING-HOUSES.

THROUGH a very long period of time the old Northmen seem to have held to one and the same custom with regard to their dwellings; and the old Sagas furnish us with very complete and unanimous testimony as to the usages in this respect in the later ages of paganism. That they

had been in existence for many centuries, both the testimony of the Sagas and the peculiar style of the dwellings themselves afford ample reasons for supposing ; and on the other side we find that they maintained this peculiarity till far down in the Christian era. Under King Olaf Kyrre's reign, in the latter part of the eleventh century, some changes were introduced into the royal palaces, which very probably served as a pattern for imitation. However, it is ascertained that chieftains (and, consequently, the lower classes of society) retained the old peculiar style till far on in the thirteenth century—a style that was pretty much the same both for high and low, except that it was on a different scale as regards size, convenience, and magnificence.

We must not suppose that the dwellings of the old Northmen were like our own, containing under the same roof a number of apartments of various sizes, or that they were several stories high. Such was not the case. Generally, each separate apartment formed a house by itself, which at most was furnished with a few small closets, passages, and a loft. A large dwelling, then, consisted of a number of such buildings or houses lying close together, which in most cases do not appear to have been connected with each other by means of covered passages. Such buildings were undoubtedly built of timber in Norway ; but in Iceland, where there were no forests, and where they had to transport all their building materials from Norway, it was probably only the well-to-do classes that were able to adopt the Norwegian style of building ;



while the poorer classes, as is the common custom there at the present day, contented themselves with erecting dwellings of stones, and of earth and turf beaten together. Brick buildings are not referred to as having been used in either country. The construction of walls appears to have been the same as that still adopted in Norway, and to have consisted of beams of timber laid over each other, and mortised together at the ends or corners. They were then sometimes covered on the outside with a panelling of planks called *skjald-pili* (or shield-plating), and were generally tarred over, in order better to withstand the influence of the weather. The walls generally formed a rather elongated oblong. The roof was erected on the two longer walls, which were but seldom very high, resting, as is still the custom, on rafters or on sloping beams, which together with its lower end were supported by beams that went right across the house on the inside, from one wall to the other; these latter were called the *þvertré*, or cross-beams, and served to give the fabric solidity and compactness. The roof was composed of wood, and was generally covered on the outside with birch-bark, which again in the better class of houses was surmounted by planking, or with thin wooden plates, lying one over the other, like the scales of a fish, which then received a coating of tar. In inferior houses turf was undoubtedly used instead. The sharp ridge where the cross-beams met above was called the *mœnir*. The uppermost beam or balk in each of the side walls was termed the *brúnáss*. The roof extended a little over the longer walls on either side, forming eaves or *ups*

(lit. roof-beard). The two shorter walls ended in a point in the ridge, and were termed the *gaftvegg* or gable-walls.

Such was the plan generally adopted in building houses, liable, of course, to any modifications which the particular purposes for which the building was intended might require. Thus not only was greater or less care bestowed upon the work, but the size, the exterior, and all the internal accommodation of the house were made to correspond. But in order to obtain a clearer idea of these peculiarities, the separate buildings of which a well-built dwelling (*bær*) consisted should one by one be taken under consideration.

Among these, then, the *höll* or hall, the *skáli*, *stofa*, or keeping room, took the principal place. The three names are often used indiscriminately, and seem originally to have meant one and the same thing. If in later times any difference was made between them, it was this—that the term *höll* was understood to refer to something more important, as the word was only used when reference was made to the principal building of a king's or great chieftain's dwelling; while the word *skáli* was also used to denominate the principal building of a Bonde's dwelling, where the old-fashioned arrangements were maintained a long time in their original purity; and, finally, *stofa* was used, either to denominate smaller out-buildings, or a division of a larger building into one or more convenient apartments. The expression *salr*, which sometimes occurs, especially in the ancient poems, seems to have originally had the same meaning as the other words.

In the following descriptive account, the term *skáli* is employed as being the one most frequently used in the Sagas, and as undoubtedly representing the most usual and peculiar of those classes of buildings with which for the present we have to do.

The *skáli* was erected in the form of an oblong, generally in a direction lying east and west, with the main entrance probably in the eastern gable end. Before this entrance was a kind of vestibule, which was called by various names, at one time *forstofa*, or *anddyri*; *framhús*, or *forskáli*. It appears to have been open in the front, and so broad that several persons could stand abreast in it. The entrance to the *skáli* itself was furnished with a door, that was usually made to fasten on the inside either with an iron bolt or bar, or with a bar of wood. The *skáli* was open to the roof, and one could see above the rafters up to the ridge. Wherever a loft is spoken of as existing in the *skáli*, thereby must be merely understood a plank covering on the cross-beams, which was reached by a ladder from below.

The floor was composed of earth firmly rammed down, and on particular occasions it was strewed over with straw or rushes. In the middle of the floor lengthways was a pavement called *arinn* or hearth, or else *eldstó* or fire-place, where fire was kindled; for stoves and chimneys were not in vogue till the latter part of the eleventh century. The smoke which filled the upper part of the room and covered the rafters with soot, had egress through an aperture in the roof, called usually *ljóri* or *reykberí*.

In the daytime light was admitted into the *skáli* partly through the *ljóri*, partly through openings called *gluggar*, made in the lower part of the roof above the uppermost beam in either of the end walls. These were closed with a covering of the thin membrane that envelopes a calf at its birth, which was called *speld* or *skyjár* (called also in Iceland at the present time *líknarbelgr*, and often employed for the same purpose), and was stretched over a wooden framework which fitted into the opening. When closed, some light came through it into the room. The *ljóri*, or smoke-hole, could be opened or closed at pleasure, either by means of a simple wooden contrivance, or with a similar arrangement to that used to close the *gluggar*. It was opened or closed by a simple mechanical contrivance similar to that used at the present day in huts or cabins in Norway. Glass was rarely used for windows in the pagan times, being only employed in the temples; indeed some time elapsed after the introduction of Christianity before it came into general use in dwelling-houses. From the above account, therefore, it may be concluded that it was rather dark in the interior of the *skáli*. Along each of the side walls there was a bench, called *langbekkr* or long bench. The one that stood against the north wall, and which therefore faced the south (or, according to an ancient expression, the sun), was expressly intended for the people of the house, and was called *æðri bekkr*, or upper bench. The master's seat was in the middle, and was called the *háseto* or high seat; in front of which were placed the two *öndvegissúlur*, or staves peculiar to the high

seat, which were considered sacred in the pagan ages. The corresponding bench on the opposite side was called the *uæðri bekk* or lower bench, and was intended for the use of any guests or strangers that might arrive. This bench also had a high seat in the middle. A third bench went along the end wall that was opposite to the main entrance; it was *þverpallr* or cross-bench, and was generally occupied by the women of the house. Occasionally the *skáli* had a door at both ends, in which case there was no cross-bench. In front of the benches were placed footstools, and the benches themselves were covered with cushions on grand occasions. Between each of the benches and the paved part in the middle of the floor sufficient room had to be left for tables which were only used at meal times, and for the attendants to move to and fro between them and the fireplaces. The walls of the *skáli* were commonly panelled on the inside; and sometimes the inside of the roof was ornamented with carved work and paintings, representing mythical or historical events, or subjects taken from nature. It was, moreover, the custom to hang up weapons, especially shields, on the walls. In the houses of chieftains each man's accoutrement usually hung up on the wall above the place allotted to him. Sometimes on great occasions the walls were decked with tapestry (*tjöld*), which probably was composed of home-wrought embroidery, or of embroidered woollen cloths, and occasionally with costly stuffs of foreign manufacture. Outside, the *skáli* was frequently surrounded by a closed passage (*skot*), in which were small doors leading into it behind the

benches. This passage either led into the vestibule or else had its own outlets.

When the *skáli* was intended to be in daily use summer and winter, it was usually called *eldaskáli*, because a fire was constantly burnt upon the hearth, by which the people of the house sat when at work, and which also served to cook their victuals. In this case the *skáli* was furnished with beds, arranged along the walls behind the benches, so that each person had his bed behind his seat. Two, or even more, occupied one bed. When the room was decked out with tapestry, these beds were probably concealed from view. Behind the cross-bench closed beds were generally set up, or, more properly speaking, one or more alcoves partitioned off. They were termed *lokhvila* or *lokrekka*, and had a door provided with fastenings on the inside. There were often several beds in one alcove, which was roomy enough to permit the occupants to dress or undress in. The alcoves were sometimes connected with the covered passage on the outside by means of doors, whilst between each of them there was a *gluggr* or aperture. The beds were often furnished with costly coverings and curtains, and were stuffed with down (*dúnnlæði*), and covered with ticking; and sheets (*blæjur*) of foreign linen were not wanting. Sometimes, moreover, the bed was hung round with the skins of animals, principally of the fox, for the better protection of its occupant. The men-folk used to occupy the beds along the side walls, while the women slept in those behind the cross-bench; an arrangement which the Sagas allude to in the following expres-

sion :—"The men rested on the long bench, the women on the cross-bench." The husband and his wife, and any guests of distinction, used to occupy the alcoves, which in general were open above into the room. When the *skáli* was furnished in this way for daily use, cupboards were generally set up on either side, in which the victuals, *e.g.* meat and dried fish, were kept. A cupboard of this description was called a *klefi*, and was connected by means of a door with the room itself.

There can hardly be any doubt that wealthy people, especially in Norway, where there was a superabundance of timber, used to have special *skáli* intended only for festive occasions, in which cases they were not furnished with beds, as above described. Different circumstances tend to the belief that the *skáli* were in general very spacious; for it required a great deal of room to accommodate so many guests as might often be found assembled at the banquets of the old Northmen; moreover, the descriptions that have been given of them confirm this opinion. An *eldaskáli*, or common living-room, in Iceland, is said to have been two hundred feet long and ten fathoms wide; another, in the same place, that was built of Norwegian timber, is described as having been thirty-five fathoms long, twenty-eight feet in height, and twenty-eight feet wide. It may therefore be assumed that, if in Iceland, where there was so much difficulty in procuring timber from abroad, apartments were to be found of such dimensions, the same fashion was observed in a richly wooded country like Norway.

As a peculiarity in the arrangements of some few *skáli*,

it may be mentioned here that the *Völsunga Sagas*, in referring to the *höll* of an ancient king named *Völsung*, allude to its being built in such a manner that a large tree stood in its midst, the trunk of which went up through the roof, above which its crown extended on all sides. Doubtless this style of architecture was peculiar to a very remote age. Not less peculiar is an account of a *skáli* at *Hankagil*, in the north of Iceland, towards the end of the tenth century, which speaks of a little brook running right through it. And, finally, it is recorded in three places in the "*Landnamabok*," that *skáli* have been built right across the road, in such a manner that all travellers had to pass through them, unless they purposely went by a circuitous route. This arrangement was undoubtedly used for purposes of a widely extended hospitality; as in these instances food and drink were laid out to which the wayfarers could help themselves at pleasure.

It will thus be readily seen, from the above description, that the *skáli* was generally arranged so that it might render any other dwelling-house superfluous. It is highly probable, too, that in the remotest ages it served as the only dwelling-house on the property; and the extreme simplicity of its arrangements probably assign to it a very great antiquity. In no other style of architecture, perhaps, is the leading idea so prominently conspicuous of seeking to provide for persons who, in a milder climate, had been accustomed to lead a nomadic life under the open heaven, or at best under tents, the shelter requisite on moving into colder and more inclement districts; an idea, too, which



it was easy to carry into effect in a country that abounded in forest tracts, and which was especially dear to them, inasmuch as it did not altogether do away with their old and favourite custom of living together in large masses. Gathered together round the large fires in the roomy and airy *skáli*, where in case of need they could have their domesticated animals with them, they were less likely to miss the invigorating and free manner of life they had led under the open sky, to which they had formerly been accustomed, but which the change of circumstances no longer admitted of. The term *skáli*, too, was used as well with reference to the simple cabin which the outlawed robber might erect in the wild depths of the forest, as a shelter for himself and horse, as to the magnificently decorated chieftain's hall, that was built and furnished in the manner above described.

But if in older days the *skáli* was the only dwelling-house on the estate, no long time elapsed before a hankering after greater accommodation and magnificence became apparent—a necessary consequence, indeed, of the ever-increasing degree of refinement which fixed habitations always introduce into the way of living—which made our ancestors seek to improve on the old and simple style of arrangement, and to erect different habitable houses for different purposes on their estates.

Among these minor habitations the *dyngja*\* must certainly be reckoned to be the most ancient ; a little detached

\* *Dyngja* means literally a nest.—Ed.

building near the *skáli*, where the women of the house generally resorted when occupied with needlework, &c.

Detached sleeping apartments, too, came early into fashion. Such a detached house, which was intended for sleeping accommodation either for the master of the house and some of the people belonging to it, or for guests, was called the *svefnskemman* or *svefnbúr*. The terms *skemman* and *búr* appear to have been used with reference to every smaller detached house on an estate; and the former is undoubtedly taken from the old Norwegian word *skammn*, signifying short, and implied probably that these kinds of buildings were usually shorter than the *skáli*, and were therefore more square-like in form. The word *skemman* is frequently used to represent a detached building intended for women of quality, especially for unmarried women, where they might take up their abode both by night and day. It is also employed—as is still the case in Iceland—with reference to off-lying storerooms, in which beds were occasionally placed. If it stood far away from all the other buildings it was called the *útiskemman*. It does not seem uncommon for the *skemman* to have been two stories in height, even in the olden days. The lower story was then called the *undirskemman*, and the upper the *skemmuloft*, or only *loft*, or loft. This upper floor was used as a sleeping apartment, and sometimes was divided into several compartments. On one or more sides this loft frequently had a kind of balcony, to which a staircase or a ladder gave access from the outside. There was also a means of communication between the loft and the balcony

on the inside, so that it was not immediately connected with the lower floor. The balcony rested either upon piles of wood or upon the timber-work of the house. Most probably it resembled the balconies now in vogue, and could either be thrown open or shut at pleasure, by means of pannel-work provided with apertures in it.

On rich men's or on chieftains' estates, there was sometimes a separate dwelling specially set apart for the reception of travellers, or of people of lower rank; such a house was called the *gestahús*.

Another building, which was not uncommon on the estates of chieftains, and especially of kings, was the so-called *málstofa*. It was made use of for purposes of conversation or for deliberations, when they were not intended for the general ear. It was probably detached from the other houses.

Although the *skáli* was arranged internally so that boiling and roasting could take place in it, it still appears to have been customary, at a very early date, on large estates, to construct a house exclusively adapted for this purpose, named *eldhús*, or fire-house. The lower servants of the estate sometimes slept there.

Sometimes, moreover, a *baðstofa*, or bath-house, was constructed, where there were warm and cold baths. In Iceland, where there are so many hot springs, advantage was taken of these to supply the bath-house with warm water. At Reykholt there may still be seen the remains of Snorre's bath, said to have been constructed by Snorre Sturlasson, who had for long dwelt there. By a very

neatly contrived stone channel the water is conveyed from Skribla, a hot spring, into a spacious basin hewn out of the solid rock, which is circular in form, and is surrounded by a seat of stone. Over this basin the bath-house once stood. In Norway the bath-room was unquestionably provided with a large bath constructed of wood, and a stove for heating the water.

Mention must here be made of the so-called earth-houses (*jarðhús*). These were secret subterranean cellars, and they were frequently found in olden times in the dwellings of the Northmen. The intention of them was, that the people of the house, and especially the owner, might be provided with a means of escape, of which no one else was cognizant, and which might be made use of in case of any sudden attack, when all the other approaches to the house were blockaded by his enemies; and also for affording a safe place of refuge, where the master of the house could bestow anybody away. In those unquiet times, when people so frequently took the law into their own hands, and when private feuds were very common, such conveniences were absolutely necessary. If intended merely to afford a secret means of escape, it consisted only of a subterranean passage, opening into that part of the house where the owner usually resorted, generally into his sleeping apartment under or behind the bed, and issuing into one or other of the outhouses, as the cattle-shed or sheep-pen; or sometimes into a neighbouring wood, where it was concealed from view by the thicket or the bushes that sur-

rounded its mouth, so that the refugee on emerging from it might have good hopes of remaining undiscovered. Sometimes also a secret underground passage of this description connected some of the habitable dwellings on the estate, passing, for instance, from the sleeping apartment to the keeping room. When it was intended to afford a place of refuge for some persecuted individual, where he could remain in safety for a lengthened period, it was then constructed with greater care, and was furnished with the most necessary requisites. The entrance to it was usually from one of the outhouses, generally from the storeroom, because it was thus easier to supply the hidden person with provisions without fear of detection. Earth houses of this latter kind were also sometimes constructed at some distance from the other houses, at a place that was but little frequented; and this was especially the case with the caves which robbers built, and where they bestowed away their booty.

The above-described houses were not, however, to be found on every "Bondegård" (peasant's farm or estate). On poorer ones there was probably only a *skáli*, a *skemma*, and perhaps, in addition, an *eldhuus*; on those of a better order there were, besides the above-named, a *dyngja* (room for the women), a *þrælahús* or distinct building for the serfs of the estate, and a bath-room; and on the estates of powerful chieftains there was, moreover, a banqueting *skáli*, specially intended for banquets, and a *gestáhus* for the accommodation of poorer travellers, and a *málstofa* for private conferences.

The lowest kind of huts were called *kot*, and their inhabitants *kotbændr*.

Amongst the outhouses the *búr* occupied the first rank. It was the storeroom, in fact, where not only the provisions were kept, but where clothes and costly articles that were not in daily use were stowed away. It generally stood in the immediate proximity of the dwelling-houses; in a few cases, though these are exceptional, it was joined to the *eldhús*. The name *útibúr*, by which it was frequently called, seems to imply that it was properly a detached building; and another title which is frequently given to it, namely, *stokkabúr*, proclaims undoubtedly that it was constructed in the same style as that which is in common use at the present day for *stolpeboder*, so that it did not rest immediately on the ground, but on piles.\* This is further confirmed by the fact that mention is made of steps forming the entrance to it. The *búr* was well provided with fastenings, and, to make "assurance doubly sure," the yard dog was chained up by it; the reason of all these precautions, doubtless, being, that it was not uncommonly made use of as a place where the pursued person might lie in concealment. Otherwise the *búr* and the *skemma* betokened one and the same building, at least on small estates. Hence the frequent interchange of the words.

The other outhouses spoken of in the old Sagas were—

\* The *stabbur* or *stolpebod* may be seen on every farm in Norway. It is used as a storeroom, and is built on piles, or blocks of wood.—  
Ed.

The *hlaða* or *kornhlaða*, a building of important dimensions in Norway. It was also called *kylna*, or drying-house, or barn (*lúfi*), and was furnished with a wooden floor, on which the corn was threshed out.

The *fjós*, cow-house, was furnished with stalls as at the present day. The cows stood along both sides, with their heads to the walls and their tails towards the middle; and the entrance was, as usual, in the gable end. Above the cow-house there was generally a loft for hay, corresponding, in fact, in a great measure, to that in use at the present day. In Iceland, however, where timber was so scarce, it was a rarity. In lieu thereof, we find mentioned a *heygarður*, or enclosure of turf, in which the hay was packed together, and a covering of turf laid over the top, from which the hay was taken to the cow-house as required. In Iceland the cow-house sometimes was connected with the *skáli* by a passage, called the *for-skali*, between the two gable ends that were nearest to each other.

The *stallr*, *hrossahús*, or stable.

The *sanðahús*, or sheep-house.

The *svínabæli*, or piggery.

The *salerni*, or *garðhús*, was sometimes connected with the *skemma*, so that one could pass to it by means of the balcony; sometimes it was placed at some distance from the dwelling-houses. It was often built so that water went under it.

If the estate were near the sea, there was always one or more boat-houses, where the boats and vessels belonging to it were kept.

The *skáli* and *dyngja* which were in daily use lay generally abreast of each other, with their gable ends to the front. In front of these was a pavement of stone, in a measure resembling a courtyard, on the opposite side of which the *skemra* or *búr* were probably situated, as is still the case in Iceland. The situation of the outhouses undoubtedly varied in different places. A fence with wickets is sometimes spoken of as surrounding the courtyard.

There was usually a well close by, if a brook did not run in the neighbourhood. Such brook or stream was termed a *brunlækur*. A convenience was erected near the well for hanging clothes on to dry.

A garden of herbs was, moreover, often to be found, and if angelica\* was grown in it, it was termed a *hvanngarður*; occasionally, too, there was a fruit garden or orchard.

The above-described arrangements with regard to buildings, &c., were such as were generally in vogue both in Norway and Iceland at the time when Christianity was introduced. It was in the latter part of the eleventh century that any changes of importance were first introduced, and those originated, as above stated, in the royal dwellings.

In the days of St. Olaf and of Harold Haardraade, says

\* Angelica was held in the highest repute by the old Northmen; and it is expressly provided in the older "Gulathing's" law, that "if any one had planted a *hvanngarður*, he was at liberty to take the plants away with him before moving to another place." In Iceland the wild angelica was under special protection, and no one was allowed to gather it off another person's property.—Ed.



the Saga, the royal houses were constructed after the old fashion. Their principal buildings consisted of a large *hirðstofa*, where the king and his followers daily resorted. The *hirðstofa* was a regular *skáli* with doors at both ends, fires along the floor, long benches against the side walls, but there was no cross-bench. The king's "high seat" was in the middle of the bench facing the sun, and opposite to it was another "high seat," which "the master of the horse," or some other of the king's chief councilors, occupied. Here they ate and drank, and for this reason it was called (in such of his palaces as he only occasionally visited) *veitslustofa*, or feasting-room. In addition to this there was a large *skáli* or keeping-room, where the king's followers slept; and at those places where he usually resided there was a "council chamber," similar to the *malstofa* described above.

In King Olaf Kyrre's time (1066–1093) an alteration took place, for in the place of the old hearths, brick stoves were set up in the banqueting-room; and, moreover, the high seat was moved from the place it had formerly occupied in the middle of the long bench to the middle of the cross-bench. The whole floor was now paved with stone, and as it was no longer used for burning fires on, no long time elapsed before planks usurped the place of the stone pavement, as being more comfortable in cold weather. These changes, especially the introduction of stoves, had unquestionably before long a very marked influence on the whole style of architecture. The *ofnstofa*, or stove-room, now usurped the principal place among the

habitable dwellings of the estate ; and as the *ljora* or smoke-hole was no longer of use, and it was desirable to retain as much of the warmth as possible within the apartment, it was ceiled with planks, which were supported by the rafters.

The *gluggr*, or apertures, too, had now to be moved from the roof to the wall ; and gradually, as glass came into use, were glazed over. By means of covered passages this room was made to communicate with several of the other buildings ; a loft was constructed above it, and cellars below ; and the dwelling apartments, which had formerly been detached, were made to approach nearer together—became, in fact, separate apartments under one and the same building. In short, the entire arrangements began gradually to approximate to those of the present day. The term *stofa*, which had previously been synonymous with *skáli*, was now applied to those parts of the building on which a greater degree of comfort was bestowed—where banquets, for instance, were held—while the old-fashioned *skáli* held only a subordinate place, though it seems for a length of time to have been the daily resort for the people of the house, and the place where the greater portion of them slept at night. The word *eldahús*, that had formerly been synonymous with *eldaskali*, and betokened the house where the cooking was carried on, and was used as a keeping-room, was now exclusively turned into a kitchen, under the name of *steikarahús* (baking-house), and was looked on as an outhouse. Still, the old timber buildings were adhered to, except in the case of some royal houses,

that were erected out of stone in the principal mercantile towns. In Norway it does not seem that fortifications to the houses were ever in vogue; though in Iceland, the Orkneys, and on the Færoe Islands, mention is occasionally made in the Sagas of chieftains, who, in connection with their dwellings, erected small towers, called *virki*, where they could take refuge in case of being surprised by an enemy.

In conclusion, it may be remarked of the buildings in towns, that they were mainly constructed on the same plans as those observed in the country, only on a smaller scale. In all probability they were built with their gables towards the street, and had an enclosed courtyard round them. The changes that King Olaf Kyrre introduced in the interior arrangements were undoubtedly at first more generally adopted in towns than in the country. Moreover, it is highly probable that Norwegian towns in those days were built without much regard to regularity or beauty, and that it was a long time before individual taste and fancy gave way to public interest. In the laws of King Magnus Lagaböter relating to mercantile towns, there are evident traces of endeavours being made to get the burghers to adopt a more regular and convenient style of architecture.

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## CHAPTER IV.

## DRESS.

A COMPLETE and full description of the dress of the old Northmen is not unattended with difficulty ; for, in the first place, our ancestors do not seem to have adopted any peculiarities in the matter of clothing, and consequently do not all seem to have followed the same custom ; and secondly, because ancient representations of art that might have thrown some light on the descriptions contained in the Sagas (which, though of frequent occurrence, and often detailed in their accounts, generally content themselves with giving names to a number of articles of wearing apparel, rather than a clear description of their nature and quality) are wanting.

We will, however, now pass in review before the reader all that we have been able to find in the Sagas that throws any light upon the subject in hand.

1st. Male Attire.—According to the Sagas, a change took place in the dress worn by men in the reign of Olaf Kyrre, *i.e.*, towards the close of the eleventh century, just as a change had occurred in the style of architecture, by the introduction of fashions from foreign lands ; whereby the older and simple style of dress, at least in the case of the king's followers, gave way to a more costly and sumptuous fashion. It is, however, difficult to make a nice distinction between what belonged to the old and what to the new fashion ; neither is it necessary to do so,

seeing that the principal articles of clothing, both before and after the above-named date, were in all important features exactly similar. A shirt (*skyrta*) was worn next the body, sometimes called *serkr* or *sark*. It was made to draw on over the head, and the hole through which the head went was called *höfuðsmátt*, and, therefore, was not very large. The shirt was probably fastened at the breast with silver studs or buckles (*sylgjur*). Wealthy people wore linen shirts; while poor people used woollen ones. When a man was dressed out for any particular occasion, care had to be taken to prevent his shirt peeping out anywhere. "Always have thy shirt," it states in the "Kongespeilet," "cut a good piece shorter than thy tunic; for no decent man can deck himself out in flax or hemp."

It was a very general custom to wear linen drawers, which with the shirt were called under one name, *linklædi*, and they were probably kept on on going to bed.

The outer covering for the legs was a pair of breeches, and of these there were two distinct kinds. The commoner kind was called *brækr*, that is, regular breeches. They were kept up by means of a band round the waist, called the *brókabelti*, which was fastened with a buckle. Generally the belt seems to have been rather wide; still, it was considered a fine thing to have a narrow one.

If the breeches were also employed as a covering for the feet as well, that is, were breeches and stockings in one, they were called *leistabrækkr*; but if they only reached down as far as the ankles, and were there tied

together, they were called *hökulbrækr*. In this case the foot was covered with a short stocking, or sock (*sokkr*).

The other kind of breeches, and which were usually considered the most dressy, were called *hosur*, hose. These seem always to have performed the double office of covering the feet, and were generally tight-fitting. They were, in fact, a kind of long stockings, and probably short breeches were worn underneath.

These hose were made either of cloth, skin, or leather, in which case they seem to have corresponded in some measure to the long boots now in use, only that they were of softer material, fitted more tightly, and reached up to the loins. Sometimes spurs were buckled on to the heels.

In either case shoes of leather or of skin were used. These were sometimes high shoes, sometimes low ones; they were kept on the foot by *skoþvengir*, shoe-buckles, which were frequently ornamented with fringes or tassels. In St. Olaf's time it was customary to wear long silk strings to the shoes, twisted round the outside of the breeches up to the knee. These strings or ribbons are sometimes called *hosnareimar*, unless indeed this appellation was applied to a kind of braces by which the breeches were kept up.

When they had to go on slippery places, they used to fasten *skóbroddar*, or spikes, underneath their shoes.

The tunic *kyrtill*, was the general covering of the body. It was probably made, like our shirts now-a-days, to draw on over the head, and was furnished with sleeves. It was fastened round the waist by a belt, frequently a very costly

article, and ornamented with silver, gold, and precious stones. The *tollekniv* was suspended from it, and occasionally a purse. The tunic was fastened at the breast by means of silver buckles. The length and width probably varied very much; but it generally seems to have reached down to the knee or a little lower. Sometimes they used to draw the breeches on over the tunic, in which case the belt was dispensed with. When a man was dressed in this manner, he was said to be "girded in his breeches." Not unfrequently the tunic was called *skyrta*, or shirt, which proves that these two articles of raiment must have borne a great resemblance to each other. Armless tunics are mentioned as something very unusual, at least in the olden times. Gloves (*glófar*) were frequently worn on the hands, made of leather, especially of buckskin, and were sometimes embroidered with gold.

To guard against cold, woollen mittens (*vettir*) were used; and sometimes they were lined inside with down.

Outside the tunic they used to wear a cape. These were of many kinds, and were generally termed *yfinhöfn*, a word implying an over garment. The kind of cape most used by the better classes was called *skikkja*. It was a cape without sleeves, fastening over the breast by means of one or more buckles, or a ribbon. A great value was attached to such capes, and they were frequently used to make presents of. It was no rare thing for them to be made of costly materials, lined on the inside with skin, and trimmed with gold or silver devices.

The hat (*höttir*) or cap (*húfa*) was the general covering

for the head. The hat was provided with a very wide brim, often so wide as to conceal the face, and was usually made of felt.

The usual colours were black, grey, or white. Gardarikan and Danish hats are most frequently mentioned; so that it may be assumed that the Northmen usually obtained coverings for their heads from abroad, and especially from Gardarika and Denmark. Caps seem even to have been more used than hats. These, doubtless, were as different in shape as in make. In one place, silken caps with gold or silver bands are alluded to; in another, caps of bearskin or sheepskin are mentioned.

The Northmen used to set a great value upon their hair. A light auburn hair, with a silky brilliancy about it, seems to have been held in the highest estimation, especially when it was long, and had not a great tendency to curl, but fell over the neck and shoulders. In olden times they probably let it grow as long as possible. People of importance used to tie a band, or a kind of diadem, round their foreheads, which was called *hlað* or *skarband*, hair-band. It was very often made of plates of gold.

Various methods of cutting the hair in later times are alluded to; still, as far as can be ascertained, it was never cut very short in the middle ages, except in the case of priests, and, in older times, of serfs. Towards the end of the twelfth century, it was the custom for the king's followers to cut their hair a little shorter than the lobes of the ear, and to wear a short crest or tuft above the eye-



brows, that is, on the forehead; in which case it was combed out smoothly all round it, so that every hair fell into its place.

With regard to beards, custom and individual taste made several changes at different times. In ancient times the old folk seem to have set a great value on a very long thick beard. It is said of Lagmand Thorgny, of Sweden, the cotemporary of St. Olaf, that his beard reached down to his knees when he sat down, and spread out over his whole chest. King Harold Haardraade is said to have worn a short beard but long whiskers. Towards the close of the twelfth century it was the custom for the king's followers to wear short beards and whiskers; while, at a later date, they used to shave the chin after the German fashion. But during the greater part of the middle ages, it seems to have been general for lay people to wear a beard; indeed, to be without a beard was considered a disgrace, though, at the same time, a delicate and fair complexion was considered to be an equal adornment to either sex.

It was usual for the men, especially men of rank, always to carry weapons with them; not only when they were travelling, or were in any strange place, but even at home, both indoors and out.

These consisted of a spear, an axe, a club, or in place of these, a staff in the hand. But they generally wore a sword girded round the waist; and in travelling they used to wear a helmet, and carry a shield on the arm. The swords very frequently had hilts of gold, and the

scabbard and sword-belt were ornamented in a most costly manner; the head of the spear and the shaft were inlaid with gold and silver; the handle of the axe silver-mounted; the helmet gilt; and the shield ornamented with paintings and gilding; so that it will be seen that these weapons were of a costly description.

What has been stated hitherto refers to the most usual male habiliments in vogue; but, in addition to these, other articles of apparel are mentioned in the Sagas, the nature of which it is more difficult to explain. We will allude to those which are of the most frequent occurrence.

The *Treyja*, or jacket, undoubtedly resembled those now used, and consisted of a short garment that served in lieu of the tunic. Jackets do not appear to have been very generally worn by the Northmen, but were more used in Denmark, whither the fashion was probably introduced from Germany. Silken jackets, without sleeves, are occasionally referred to, and they were worn over the cuirass: they were nothing more than a short surcoat.

*Slædur* was an ornamental attire, used, as it appears, only by kings and persons of high rank. It resembled the tunic in having no sleeves; but it reached down to the feet like a woman's skirt. Most generally it was made of fine cloth, silk, or other costly material, and not unfrequently was embroidered with gold. Besides this, it was sometimes trimmed with gold buttons from top to bottom, and was very likely open in front, and meant to be fastened with clasps or to be buttoned up.

The *Kufl* was also a kind of tunic. It is frequently

mentioned, and it is easy to form an idea of its appearance, as the word is employed with reference to the tunic worn by monks. It was furnished with a hood that could be drawn over the head, or thrown back on the neck, at pleasure, and seems to have been made with sleeves; it was capacious, reached down to the feet, and was confined at the breast with a belt. It seems mostly to have been used as an overcoat; and as it was so well adapted to conceal the features, it was commonly worn by people who did not wish to be recognized. When specially intended for this purpose, it was called the *dularkufl* (from *dylja*, to hide).

The *Hekla* also seems to have resembled the *Kufl*; like it, it was furnished with a hood, and served the purposes of an overcoat. Whether it had sleeves or not is not clear; but it appears that it was often made of costly stuff, of a scarlet colour, and that it was a garment that women often used.

*Stakkr* and *úlpa* were a simpler kind of tunic. Seafaring men, fishermen, or persons employed in any work where they were liable to get wet, used to have them made of leather. In Iceland this garment is still used, under the same name; it is cut in the same manner as a shirt, reaches below the hips, and is made of sheepskin, with the wool on, prepared with oil. The *stakkr* of olden times is found to correspond exactly with this.

The *úlpa* or *ólpa* was a kind of frock worn by peasants, generally of thick coarse stuff or leather, sometimes with the hair on, in which latter case it was called *loðúlpa*. It

seems to have been both capacious and reached far down. It was generally used as a travelling garment, outside the other clothes.

The so-called *bjálfi* was probably of a similar nature: it is alluded to as being generally made out of reindeer hide, and undoubtedly resembled the reindeer "pelts" (cloak of skin, &c.) now in use.

There was another garment frequently alluded to under the name of *hjúp*, which also seems to have been a kind of tunic, for where the word *hjúp* is found in old writings, a note of explanation is appended to it, describing it as a short mantle. It was occasionally worn outside the cuirass as a surcoat. Sometimes it was made in a costly, at others in a simple style; both silk and leather are mentioned as the materials from which it was made. A *hjúp* of this latter description was termed *kösungr*.

*Kápa*, a cape, was a kind of overcoat. It appears to have been generally of great length, and to have been furnished with sleeves, but it could also be used as a cloak. The *loðkapa* was a hairy cape with sleeves, generally reaching down to the feet, and fastened at the waist by a belt: it was generally used on journeys.

*Möttull* was unquestionably of almost the same description as the *skikkja*, alluded to above: the terms are used indiscriminately. It is described as being a not very long cape, without sleeves, fastening over the breast with ribbons or buckles. It was often made out of costly materials, silk and scarlet cloth, and lined with valuable furs.

*Feldr*, or *vararfeldr*, was a garment which is frequently alluded to in the Sagas, but of the nature of which it is not easy to form any clear idea. It was a very wide and heavy cape, as it appears, generally with the hair on on one side, sometimes on both, in which case it was called *feldr tvíloðinn*. Probably one side was of sheepskin, with the wool on, while the other was of some manufactured material, generally wadmél. Sometimes it was of different colours on the inside and outside, and it was then called *feldr hálfskiptr*; thus mention is made of a *feldr* that was black on one side and white on the other. It was of such width that it lay in several folds; and its mercantile value was estimated according to the number and size of these folds. A full-sized *vararfeldr* ought to be about six feet long, three feet wide, and have twelve folds. It was so large that it could be drawn over the head as one was sitting, and could be used as a covering for the whole body when one lay down. The usual colour was grey; hence the name *gráfeldr*, though black and blue ones are also spoken of. It had, it seems, openings in the sides, through which the arms could be thrust at pleasure, made so as to button underneath the arm when necessary. Generally it was used as a loose hanging cape, as may be gathered from the expressions used in several places with reference to putting it on. Besides this, there was a garment specially intended to be used on a journey, and consequently always made out of simple home-made material, such as stuff or leather. Great value was attached to it, depending on the quantity of stuff it contained.

Sometimes it was ornamented in an expensive manner. Thus edgings, probably of gold or silver ornaments, round the arm-holes are spoken of. The so-called *dálkr* or *feldardálkr*, which was a sort of clasp to keep the *feldr* in across the chest, seems often to have been of great value. Thus gold *dálkr* are alluded to; and when the Icelanders wished to give the Norwegian Skald (bard), Eyvind Skaldespilden, a present in return for an ode he had composed in their honour, they melted a quantity of silver, and had a *feldardálk* wrought from it of the value of fifty marks of silver, which they sent to him. A peculiar kind of *feldr* is alluded to under the name of *skautfeldr*, but in what points it differed from the common *vararfeldr* is not stated. The *vararfeldr* was a staple article of commerce both in Norway and Iceland.

*Vest* was also the name of a kind of cape, which is nowhere accurately described; except that we find that it was of a different colour on its two sides, and that it was also called *slagningr*.

*Verja* is mentioned less often, but is described as being a long overcoat, with a hood, made out of rags or patches, sewn together. The term was especially used for any mean garment, which only poor people used to wear.

*Pilz* and *pilzungr* are still less frequently alluded to, and were undoubtedly only some peculiar kind of dress worn by persons of eccentric character. *Pilz*, at the present day in Iceland, signifies a shirt; and it is also ascertained that it used to reach down to the heels.

*Pilzungr* signified a little shirt, used over the *Pilz*, and reached to the middle of the calf.

*Kjafal*, or *bjafal*, as it is otherwise called, is said to have been a Scotch dress, and was probably never in use among the Northmen. It is described as being a tunic open at the sides, buttoned between the legs, but in other respects without any band or belt; it was furnished with a hood to throw over the head, and was used both by men and women, who then had no other clothing on their bodies.

Besides the head-dresses above alluded to, *hetta*, *kveif*, and *kofri* are mentioned as being peculiar.

The first-named differed from the hat or cap in this respect, that it hung down over the neck. The *kveif* appears to have been used in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries by people of rank, whether ecclesiastics or laymen; but nothing has been learnt of its appearance. Neither is any detailed description given of the *kofri*, except that it was sometimes made out of lamb's skin.

The so-termed *gríma* must not here be passed over. It was a kind of covering for the face, which was much used by persons who wished to preserve their incognito. This *gríma*, or mask, seems generally to have been fastened to the hat or hood, and was in all probability mostly used in connection with the above-described *kúfl*, consisting generally of a piece of cloth with eyelet holes. When a person wore this mask in order to preserve his incognito, he was said *at fara með huldu höfði*—i.e., to go with a covered head. But a distinction must be made between this

covering for the face and the so-called *url*, which is only occasionally mentioned, but appears to have been a kind of veil, which people of rank sometimes wore over their faces, either because they were troubled with weak eyes or to prevent getting tanned by the sun.

Several kinds of ornaments are mentioned in the Sagas as having been used by men. Bracelets of gold and silver, sometimes of great weight, and rings of gold, were generally worn by rich people and persons of rank. Such rings are frequently found in barrows, of pagan date, and from their nature and quality it is easy to determine that they were generally of very simple workmanship, the reason of which undoubtedly was, that they were used instead of money in commercial transactions, and had therefore not unfrequently to be cut asunder. Still, rings of more artistic workmanship are sometimes found in pagan graves.

Another kind of ornament is mentioned under the name of *men*. It was certainly an ornament for the neck or bosom, of whatever material it was composed. Occasionally heavy gold necklaces are found in the barrows, sometimes of plain workmanship, sometimes twisted or braided, and highly decorated; silver chains also, with figured gold plates attached, have been found, mostly of embossed manufacture; and a number of loose plates of this description, together with foreign coins of silver and gold, both of which are furnished with chains, and therefore intended to be suspended on ribbons; and, finally, beads of precious metals. All these are unquestionably *men*, or relics of *men*.



Connected with this there is another ornament that is sometimes alluded to in the Sagas under the name *steinsörvi*. The word itself, derived from *steinn*, a stone, and *sörvi*, necklace, implies that it was a kind of bead necklace. In the pagan barrows of all three Scandinavian kingdoms, beads of amber, coral, burnt clay, and especially of coloured glass, are found, occasionally in great numbers, in one and the same place; sometimes in a kind of mosaic work, and generally of different forms and degrees of polish. These almost universally bear traces of having been threaded on ribbons or threads, and are unquestionably relics of the stone necklaces of antiquity, which in those days, when articles wrought in glass were rare, were highly esteemed as costly gems.

Glass beads, called in the old Sagas *steinar*, or more properly *glertölun*, were also used for trimming garments, though they were probably more used by women than by men.

The *tollekniv*, the proper place for which was by the side, was sometimes worn round the neck, suspended, perhaps, from some decoration for the throat. Sometimes even the belt to which the knife was attached was hung round the neck. Later on, in the Christian ages, some people used to wear their prayer-books, naturally handsomely bound, suspended from the neck; such books were termed *hálsbók*, or neck-books. Otherwise they used to carry such books in the pocket or purse (*púss*), which generally hung from the belt or from the breeches-band, and which served in lieu of a pocket.

The buckles used in fastening the various articles of clothing must also be reckoned among the ornaments. In general they were of curious workmanship, and not unfrequently made out of precious metals. They are alluded to in the Sagas under the names *sylgja*, *tygill*, or *tyglar*, *dálkr*, and *nist*, although it is difficult to ascertain whether any specific difference is intended by each of these different names.

The *sylgja* unquestionably corresponded to the well-known silver brooch (*sölgjer*), so much used at the present day in Norway by the peasants for fastening their linen together across the chest. Sometimes they were made of gold.

*Tygill*, occurring more frequently in the plural *tyglar*, were probably hooks, or rings, or eyelet holes, on either side of the breast of the cape, through which a string was drawn, occasionally a gold string, and thus fastened it together. A similar contrivance, too, was used in the *skikkja*, and especially in the *möttul*; whence the expression that occurs so frequently, *tyglamöttull*, where the word *tygill* is evidently derived from the verb *teygja*, to draw.

The *Dálkr* was mostly used, it seems, with the *feldar*; and there is every reason to suppose, from expressions in the Sagas, that it was a kind of shawl-pin.

Nothing can be ascertained concerning the so-called *nist*, except that it was used in wearing the *skikkja*, and that in the eleventh century it was the fashion to wear it long.

In conclusion, an ornament is frequently referred to as being used with different articles of dress, and that is the so-called *hlað*, which generally consisted of a trimming or edging of metallic ornamented work, fastened to the garments. It seems to have been used round the cap and round the cape. When the Sagas speak of a cape being ornamented with *hlað* down to the skirts, as they frequently do, it must be understood thereby that the cape had an edging of metallic ornaments from top to bottom.

With regard to colour and material, wearing apparel differed very much. Poorer people used common cloth of black, grey, or greyish-brown wadmel, particularly of wadmel that retained the natural colour of the wool. Perfectly white wadmel was held in the lowest repute; hence it was mostly used for serfs' clothes. People of quality, as for instance, Sigurd Syr, a Fylki king (petty king) very often contented themselves with wearing simple articles of clothing for every-day use. Sigurd, also, is said to have worn a blue tunic, blue hose, high shoes fastening round the calf, grey cape, grey broad-brimmed hat, a veil for the face, and a staff with a gilt hoop or ring to it; but on particular occasions he would dress himself in hose of Spanish leather, to which were buckled gilt spurs; or in furs, and outside, a cape of scarlet cloth; and would gird himself with a highly ornamented sword, and wear a gilt helmet on his head. Chiefs and wealthy peasants usually distinguished themselves by wearing garments of expensive colour, and often of foreign material, which they wore when engaged in field work, or in other domestic

employments. The colours that are alluded to as being held in the greatest estimation were blue, red, green, and brown ; sometimes, but not often, party-coloured garments are mentioned. The different articles of clothing were usually of different colours, and of different descriptions of material. Fine cloth, especially the so-called scarlet, by which was meant cloth of a deep red colour, was used principally for the tunic, the breeches, and hose ; this last kind of trousers was often made of black or Spanish leather, more rarely of white cloth. The cape was generally the most costly garment of all, and was frequently made of scarlet cloth, of silk, or some other gorgeous texture of foreign manufacture. Names of several expensive stuffs are found mentioned in the Sagas, the nature of which is no longer known ; as, for instance, *guðvefr*, which is frequently mentioned as being used for capes ; and *pell*, *fustan*, *baldikin*, and many others.

Before dismissing the subject of men's attire, we must briefly allude to certain foreign fashions, which, according to the Sagas, in King Olaf Kyrre's days were in vogue amongst the Northmen.

Snorre's remarks hereupon are as follows :—" Then they adopted costly fashions, foreign customs and styles of dress. They used dress hose (*drambhosur*) gathered about the leg. Some used to hang gold rings about their calves. Then, too, they used to wear 'drag'-tunics (*dragkyrtill*) buckled at the side (*dragkyrtla lax at sidu*) with sleeves ten feet long, and so narrow that they had to draw them on with a hand-cord, and gather them up to the shoulders ;

high shoes, embroidered all over with silk, and sometimes overlaid with gold. Many other showy things were used then." It thus appears from Snorre's description that the new fashions did not introduce any entirely new article of dress among the people, but only that the old style and cut was altered and made more peculiar. These new modes were, doubtless, of Norman-French origin, and came over to Norway from England; but there is a great deal that is obscure in this account. The novel *drambhosur*, certainly, only differed from the old *hosur* in this respect, that they were gathered about the leg. The use of gold rings on the calves of the legs, too, must have been unknown in older days, as they were only used for the neck, arms, and fingers. But the remarks about the tunic are the most difficult of explanation. The expression *dragkyrtill* probably implies merely a tunic to draw, that is, to buckle or fasten together; and the expression *laz at sidu*, should be rendered, "with buckles at the side;" in other words, that these tunics were open at the sides, but had a contrivance by which they could be buckled or fastened together. The new fashion in the tunics aimed, therefore, at making them narrower, and to sit closer to the body than could have been the case when they were made after the old fashion, that is to say, they were cut exactly like a shirt. On the whole, the tunic was made to correspond with the narrow sleeves that were introduced. Tunics of the same or similar cut as those Snorre describes appear to have been occasionally used in more ancient days. Thus it is related of Egil Skallagrimsson,

of Iceland (in the tenth century), that when he buried his son Bödvar, who had been drowned, he wore a red fustian tunic, narrow above, and with fastenings at the side; which tunic, as well as the narrow *hosur*, as the story goes, "split, when Egil's frame swelled out, owing to the strong emotion grief at his loss produced." Egil had resided a great deal in England, and had very likely adopted this style for his tunic from that country, as it was unusual amongst the Northmen at that period. The anecdote, however, throws some light on Snorre's description, and serves to confirm the explanation offered above. It is still more difficult to ascertain what was understood by the *handty gill*, which was used for the narrow sleeves; generally, it is considered to have been a kind of cord or band for drawing the garment on. Neither is it easy to decide whether the high shoes alluded to were high-heeled shoes, or whether they were shoes that reached high up the leg; but, probaby, they were of the last-named description.

It is related of King Olaf's son, King Magnus Barefoot (1098-1103) that "he and several of his followers, after their expeditions to Scotland and Ireland, adopted the style of dress used in those countries, and went with bare legs, short tunics, and short capes." This custom, however, scarcely lasted beyond the days of King Magnus, and, even then, was a phenomenon. The fashion, however, that was adopted in Olaf Kyrre's time, seems to have been in vogue among the followers of the king, and among chiefs in Norway until the days of King Magnus Erlings-

son (1161–1184) and one can partly recognize in it the costume which the Jarl Erling Skakke, according to the old fashion, is said to have worn. “He wore,” it is said, “the old-fashioned costume, a long boddice, and long sleeves to his tunic. Over the tunic *valskikkjar* (undoubtedly a peculiar kind of cape) and high shoes.” He also made his son, King Magnus, wear this dress in his youthful days; but when Magnus was older, and began to be more his own master, he dressed himself after a more showy style. It may also be observed that fashions that were considered new in the second half of the eleventh century, were at the close of the following century looked upon (at least by the king’s retinue) as old-fashioned, and had to give way to other and strange fashions, of which, however, no detailed account is given.

From remarks made in the “Kongespeilet,” of the costume of the Norwegian kings’ “hird,” or retinue, one may be led to believe that towards the close of the twelfth century a return to the older and simpler style of dress was apparent, rather than any progress being observed in the adoption of strange fashions. It is very possible that King Sverrer was the cause of this, in order that he might afford a striking contrast to his rival, King Magnus Erlingsson. Several of the Norwegian kings who succeeded him endeavoured to set bounds to the increasing propensity to adopt strange fashions in dress which was observable in their kingdoms.

There are several ordinances by King Haakon Magnusson the older (1299–1319) in which, resting upon the

example of his ancestors, he forbids luxurious pomp in clothing and the introduction of foreign fashions, while he draws attention to the costume worn by himself, and which he makes his retainers wear, as a copy for imitation.

These ordinances give a clear idea of what were the views of the Norwegian kings in the thirteenth and the beginning of the fourteenth centuries; but their effect in restraining the luxurious style of dress is highly questionable.

With regard to the costumes of Norwegian women in ancient times, our old memorials are even still more chary in the information they afford.

The garment which women used to wear next their skin was called *serkr*, or "sark," and was usually made of linen; women of rank sometimes had them made of silk. It differed, as it appears, from the shirt used by men, by being more cut out in the breast. They used to keep it on at night, hence it was often called *náttserka*, or night-"sark."

On their legs they used to wear socks and shoes, called under one name, *skoklædi*.

The tunic was the important article of their apparel. It reached down to the feet, and was undoubtedly, as a rule, provided with long sleeves reaching down to the wrist; though traces are found of their having their arms sometimes uncovered, a custom probably only practised by unmarried women. Sometimes the tunic was wide, especially at the bottom; in this case it was confined at the waist by a gold or silver belt, suspended from which



they used to wear a bag to put their rings, gold ornaments, and other small things in. At her belt, too, the housewife used to carry her keys. Sometimes the tunic was narrow throughout, especially in the middle. The word *nám*, which seems to denote a particular kind of stuff, was used to signify a peculiar sort of tunic (*nám-kyrtill*). Sometimes also the tunic had a narrow bodice, called *upphlutr*. It is also mentioned that women would tie over the tunic a *blæja* (cloth) which probably served as a kind of apron, and was adapted for this particular purpose. It was sometimes very showy, and was spotted with coloured speckles, and edged with a fringe. The tunic did not commonly reach so high up as quite to conceal the neck and bosom; for this purpose women seem to have used a peculiar article called *smokkr*, a kind of collar, and a kerchief which was tied round the neck.

Still it appears that women of quality occasionally had the neck and the upper part of the bosom uncovered, and merely decorated with necklaces, or similar ornaments. A kind of ornament for the shoulders is alluded to under the name of *dvergar*, but of what nature they were is not mentioned. Women of quality, as well as men, are said to have worn *slæður*, an ornamental kind of dress, on special occasions. They are described as reaching down to the feet, somewhat after the manner of a train. For the expression *slæður* implies the track made by something that is dragged along the ground.

Women of the higher classes usually used to wear a cape outside the tunic, called sometimes *skikkja*, sometimes

*mötull*. It was without sleeves, and generally fastened over the breast with a buckle or band. Another kind of cape used by women is alluded to under the name of *vefjarskikkja*, or *vefjarmötull*.

By this was probably denoted a cape not meant to be fastened over the bosom, but only to be worn loosely over the tunic as a kind of shawl. The capes worn by women were often very expensive, and were edged with ornaments in metal, and underlined with minever fur. It may be concluded that there was some difference between the capes worn by women and those worn by men, as the former are more generally alluded to under the name of *kvennskikkja* (women's capes). Very probably the only difference between them was that it was longer, and reached down to the feet; while the cape worn by the men reached only to a little below the knee.

Naturally, the women did not esteem long and beautiful hair less highly than the men did. A light auburn tint was most thought of; and for a woman to be considered a perfect beauty, it was essential that her skin should be white, and her complexion delicate. Girls usually wore their hair loose, confined round the forehead with a band. Those of higher rank used to wear a band of gold, or a diadem of golden ornamented work.

If the hair was particularly beautiful and long, the ends were sometimes tucked in under the belt. Married women used generally to wear a covering on their heads, consisting of a large cloth, called *höfúðurk* (head-cloth), which was put on in different ways. A "head-covering," when

set on, was generally called *faldr*, and to put one on *at faldasér*; but they received different names according to the way in which this was done. Thus *krókfaldr*, *sveigr*, and *mótr* are mentioned; but the difference between them cannot be ascertained with any degree of accuracy. The two first seem as if they implied a bent form; and, very likely, the head-dresses of these descriptions resembled the *skaut* or *skautfaldr*, which is still used in Iceland, and which is bent from the back part of the head over to the forehead, in the shape of a horn. But nothing is known about the shape of the so-called *mótr*, except that it was sometimes very handsomely got up, and of a very costly description. Thus in the "Lardöla" Saga a white *mótr* is mentioned, in which twenty-four carats of gold were worked in. In addition to these names, two expressions occur in the ancient language, which seem to refer to two kinds of head-dress with peculiar titles; these are *at typpa* and *at skupla*. The first, which occurs in the old Edda "Thrymskvida," is undoubtedly derived from *toppr*, a tuft or crest, and appears to have denoted a cloth that was wrapped round the head like a crest. The expression in the poem alluded to is used in connection with the so-called Brudeliin that has been already spoken of; but it does not appear whether it was the Brudeliin itself that was wrapped round the head in the form of a crest, or whether this only hung down over the head-dress. The expression *at skupla* occurs in the "Jomsvikinga" Sagas, as synonymous with *at falda sitt*, i.e., to arrange the head-dress in such a way as to conceal a great portion of the face, or to

hang low down over the face. It was used for the bride's head-dress on her wedding-day; and the context shows that one could not properly see the face of the person who wore it, and that on this account it was called *skupl* or *skupla*. And as it appears from other passages as if the "Brudeliin" concealed nearly the whole of the bride's face, it is very probable that the expression *at skupla* was used to describe the manner in which it was usually put on; a supposition strengthened by the fact that, from passages quoted from the "Jomsvikinga" Sagas, it is evident that brides on the second day of the wedding ceremonies used not to *skupla*, but allowed their faces to be seen.

As the old Skalds, in speaking of a woman, frequently address her as *hvitfölduð*, i.e., with a white head-dress, or as *linbundin*, i.e., linen bound, it may be assumed that the head-dress in question was generally made of white linen. It was considered stately to wear the head-dress high; and as the cloth of which it was composed was sometimes very long, it was not difficult to accomplish this *desideratum*. Thus mention is made of a head-dress inwoven with gold which was forty feet in length.

The head-dress does not seem always to have quite concealed the hair; at least it is found that widows, who were equally privileged with married women to wear the head-dress, sometimes even when out of doors, and when dressed out for state occasions, used to wear their hair hanging down over their breast and tucked in at the belt. Probably in this case they had the head-dress hanging

loosely down, as a kind of veil. Most generally, however, women used to wear their hair done up, even if it was not entirely hidden by the head-dress. Hair done up in this way is called in the old language *haddr*.

When travelling, women seem to have used overclothing of the same description and kind as that used by the other sex. Thus *ólpa*, and hoods of felt, as well as hats (*hötr*) are alluded to. *Hekla*, a kind of travelling cape, was used by women as well as by men.

Their ornaments were almost entirely the same; bracelets, rings, ornaments for the neck and bosom, buckles and edgings of gold and silver.

The material, too, of which their garments were made, as well as their colour, was very similar. Blue and red seem to have been the colours most admired. A tunic of scarlet cloth, and a cape of red or blue silk, are mentioned in several places as being the state dress of women of high rank. Moreover, there can be no question that fashion had as great influence, in all matters relating to female attire, as was the case with that of the other sex, although the old Sagas do not allude to it.

The sketches of the ancient historical relics of the dress of the Northmen in olden times seem especially to evince symptoms of a hankering after parade, and of a desire of exhibiting their wealth to the public gaze—a feature in the popular character which is found to have been inherited by their descendants, the Norman-French, who, according to the authority of foreign historical authors, were long known for their extravagant style of dress.

## CHAPTER V.

## THEIR DAILY LIFE AND OCCUPATIONS.

IN a sketch of the daily occupations of the old Northmen, we must especially take into consideration the well-to-do *bonde* (peasant). The Norwegian peasant must always be considered to have been the chief representative of the Norwegian people: in ancient days he was, so to speak, the only one. Not only did the *bönder* (plur. of *bonde*) compose the great mass of the population and the most influential portion of the political community, but the very word itself comprised in reality everything that savoured of freedom amongst the people; for the highest chieftains of the country, up to the very person of the king, were *bönder*.

City life did not show any signs of existence in Norway until the middle of the eleventh century, and cannot be said to have made any head till the middle of the following century. But throughout the whole of the middle ages the mercantile towns of Norway never attained such importance in the State as to permit of the townsman ever becoming the countryman's instructor in a more advanced state of civilization, or in a more refined morality. On the contrary, as in public life, throughout the whole of that period of time, the towns can only be considered to have existed for the countryman's sake; so, in matters relating to private life, town life was nothing but an

imitation of country life, modified, naturally, throughout, though not to any great degree, according to circumstances.

True enough the king, at an early date, took up his residence in the flourishing mercantile towns, as did the higher orders of the Church; but in other respects everything that savoured of civilization, everything that was rich or powerful among the people, had its fixed dwelling in the country. The chieftain's proper residence was at the principal farm on the Odels (allodial) estate, where, surrounded by his relatives and retainers, he lived as master in the strictest sense; whilst he only inhabited the house which he generally owned in the nearest town so long as business matters or the presence of the king kept him there.

The well-to-do *bonde* usually had a rather numerous body of retainers, called in the old language *hjón*, or *hjú*, a word which signifies nearly the same thing as the *familia* of the Romans. In olden times they consisted of freemen and serfs. The free male retainers were called *húskarlar*, *verkmenn*, and *vinnumenn*. The word "*huskarl*" implied something more honourable than the other two, which properly signify workpeople. Piratical expeditions, the numerous intestine feuds, and the love of making a display of power, were the reasons why chieftains and the wealthy *bönder* surrounded themselves with a numerous body of freemen, who were well practised in the use of weapons. The Norwegian chief, Erling Skjalgssön, had constantly by him ninety or more freemen (*frelsingjar*), who lived at his cost; a number which he increased to over two hundred on the approach of an enemy. The chief, Geirmund

Heljarskind, who migrated from Hördeland to Iceland, and who was of royal descent, was usually surrounded by eighty men capable of bearing arms.

The free female servants were named *vinnukonur*, *gríðskonur*, and sometimes *ambáttir*, names which correspond to those now in use—servant-women and servant-girls. The male servants that were in a state of bondage were called *þrælar*, serfs; the female, *ambáttir*, serf-women. Some of these had fixed employments. The chief among the serfs was called *þjónn* and *bryti*. The office of the first-named of these is not known; the other, however, was a kind of house-steward, who had the superintendence of the entire farm. Among the female serfs also the *seta* and *deigja* were more looked up to than the rest. The last-named was a kind of housekeeper, who superintended the household arrangements under the mistress's supervision. On serfdom becoming obsolete, free service took its place; and henceforth the names *ráðsmaður* (advising man), and *ráðskona* (advising woman), seem to have become more general than the older *bryti* and *deigja*, though in some places these were still retained. An inferior order of male servants, with fixed appointments, were the *hirðir* or *hjarðarsveinn*, herdsman, whose office, especially on large estates, was subdivided amongst others. Thus there were *smalamaður*, shepherds; *nautakarl* or *fjóskarl*, men who saw after the cattle and the cattle-houses; *hestasveinn* or *hrossasveinn*, stablemen, whose duty it also was to tend the horses when out at grass. Among the lower orders of female servants are mentioned the *matselja*, whose business



it was to apportion and serve out the victuals; in all probability they were synonymous terms with *deigja* or *raðskona*.

The other servants had their daily tasks allotted to them by the master or mistress of the house. For the men these consisted principally of field-work, for which the same kind of implements were used as now-a-days, except that they were perhaps more simply made; the *chase*, which was principally followed in winter time on "ski;"\* *fishing*, which was a very important source of maintenance for the people; *collecting birds' eggs*; *chopping wood*; *charcoal burning*; *the manufacture of tar*; *making salt*; *the supervision of building work*, and *the repairing of farming implements*.

The women had to milk; see to the preparation of the victuals; help in the field-work, especially during hay-time, where in olden days, as at the present time, they were employed in making the hay. Added to this, there were the usual womanly employments, such as the treatment of flax and wool, carding, spinning, weaving, and sewing. Finally, they had to wait on the men-folk of the house; and each woman had one or more of the fellows whom she had especially to attend to. They had to see to their clothes and keep them clean; besides which they had, undoubtedly (as is still the custom in Iceland), to

\* The "ski," a peculiar kind of snow-skate used in Northern Europe. It is twelve or thirteen feet long, three or four inches wide, tapering towards the front, and turned up. *Vid.* "Sport in Norway, and where to find it," p. 132.—ED.

undress the men when they went to bed, and to wash and dress their hair.

The Viking expeditions, which throughout the whole duration of paganism and far on into the Christian age, had been a source of wealth and a favourite occupation for the Norwegian chiefs and wealthy *bönder*, did not so entirely absorb the whole of their attention as to render them careless in the management of their households or in the prosecution of agricultural pursuits. It was customary, say the records, for the owner of a farm to sow his seed in the spring of the year, and then to set out on the so-called "Spring Viking." He returned home about midsummer, and, after seeing his crops housed, again set out on the "Autumn Viking," from which he did not return till about the end of November, when he remained quietly with his followers at home over the winter. Besides this, when the *bonde* had got into years, he would confine himself entirely to agriculture, and let one or other of his younger sons go on the "Viking" instead.

The master and mistress of a house were by no means idle, neither were their children, though they might be rich and of high rank. Thus, King Sigurd Syr of Ringerike used to go into the fields and assist his labourers in sowing. "Accompanied by two men," it is stated, "he would at one time be in the field where they were cutting the corn, at another in the barn. He was dressed in simple clothes: a blue tunic and blue hose, with high shoes tied round the calf, and had a grey cape and broad-brimmed hat, a veil for his face, and a staff in his hand with a silver

ferrule." The Icelandic chiefs, the hero Gunnar of Hlidarende, and Höskuld, skilled in the law, with the surname Hvitanesgoðe, have been seen to take off their costly robes and sow corn. The chief, Skalla-Grim, used to stand in the forge and hammer out the iron. The sons of the powerful Ingemund of Vatsdal, in Iceland, used to take turn and turn about at farm work, and some of them used to occupy themselves with fishing; "for," adds the old Saga, "it was then the custom for the children of people of rank to do some work." Young men of noble descent used mostly to busy themselves with their weapons, see that they were kept in proper order, or exercise themselves in using them, or amuse themselves with different sports or games. Women of rank would busy themselves in embroidery and fancy work; though it appears that they often took part in household work. Thus it is said that the queens of King Alfrek saw to the bleaching of their fine linen, and used to vie with each other in brewing ale.

Kings and powerful chieftains, to whom many people used to apply for counsel and assistance, used in very remote times to seat themselves daily on a hillock near the house, most probably on the barrow of one of their ancestors, in order that any person might have free access to them.

While sitting there, they would occupy their time with some unimportant matter; or would play with their hounds or hawks, smooth out their horse's mane, or pass the time away in some such pursuit. It was customary for the

chieftain on these occasions to sit by himself, in order probably that all comers might be able to speak to him in the strictest confidence. Or else people of rank used to be followed everywhere by one or two men, who served as companions to them, and who, at the same time, waited upon them. Thus we find that, at a very early date, men and women of rank used to have so-called chamberlains in attendance upon them.

The general time for rising in the morning and for going to work, seems to have been between four and five o'clock; which hour, therefore, both in older and in later times, was called *rismál* (or getting up time). The herdsmen had to be the first astir. The general time for going to bed appears to have been between ten and eleven at night, and was termed *háttatími* (from *háttá*, to go to bed; *tími*, hour).

There were doubtless, however, modifications in this respect, depending both on the season of the year and the nature of the employment in hand. Old people used to like to go to bed early and to rise late; and people of rank were extremely particular that nobody, except in cases of absolute necessity, should disturb their night's rest. During the daytime, when there was no work for the men to do on the land, they would keep in the same room with the master of the house. Each man had his appointed seat on the bench; namely, in front of the bed on which he slept at night. If any one were quite idle, he would generally lie down at full length on the bench, wrapped up in his cloak, which, as before stated, served

both as a cape and as a covering for him at night. Or, if any man had matters of importance to reflect upon, he would assume the same position, or go to bed and spread his cloak over his head; in which position he would sometimes lie the whole day and night, during which time no one might disturb him. Any one who was in great affliction would act in a similar way; and it was considered, on the whole, to be a mark of sorrow when a person wrapped his head up in his cape. People of distinction would generally have a pillow underneath their heads when resting on the bench.

Provided the women had no work to do out of doors, and had not to busy themselves with preparing the victuals, they would sit in the *dyngja* (*vide* p. 64, note) during the daytime with their needlework. The men, too, used to like to resort there, while the suitors of the servant-girls, and others who liked to chat with the women, found it a by no means unpleasant place. Tramps and beggars, too, used to look in in the *dyngja*, and retail the latest news. Many a merry joke might be heard there, which it was not always desirable should come to the master's ears; there, too, scandal was rife; and there witty fellows would give vent to their love of fault-finding in caustic and satirical rhymes, which the women received with lively expressions of delight, but which often cost the utterer of them his life.

It appears that in general a relationship of a very confidential nature existed between the family and the servants of the house. It was of rare occurrence for

either the master or the mistress to ill-treat any of the free servants of the house ; and when they did do so, the aggrieved party did not passively submit to it. Jorunn, the wife of the Icelandic chief Höskuld, could not endure her serving-woman Melkorka, the daughter of an Irish king, who had been taken prisoner in a Viking expedition, and sold as a serf, and subsequently bought by Höskuld. One evening when Melkorka was helping her mistress to undress, she laid her shoes and stockings on the floor : Jorunn was angry at this, and whisked her with them over the ears, whereupon Melkorka became enraged, and gave her mistress a blow on the nose that deluged her face in blood. Höskuld had to separate them ; and, in order to restore peace, had to remove Melkorka to a little dwelling in the neighbourhood of the house. Such episodes, however, were of very rare occurrence.

In the evening the whole household used to assemble in the *skáli*, or keeping-room, round the fire-hearths, called in turns *langeldar*, from being kindled along the whole length of the room, with a small space between each ; or *setueldar*, from the people sitting round them ; or *máleldar*, from their preparing the food at them ; sometimes also called *sviðueldar*, from being used for scalding the heads of slaughtered animals, &c. Here the family and the household would mingle freely together. The evening was spent in lively mirth, and in amusing, and often edifying, conversation ; the brighter the fires burned, the greater the hilarity. Some of the women would now seat themselves on the cross-bench, work in hand, while others

busied themselves with the great cauldrons on the fires; the lads would either sit or loll upon the long benches; the children played upon the floor; the master would be in his "high seat," or, if he were an old man, would draw a movable chair closer to the fire. These movable chairs, of which there were some in every house, were called *reiðustólar*, and appear to have been a kind of armchair, the arms of which were frequently curiously carved, and were called *stólbrúðir*: they were so roomy that several people could sit in them at once.

The men-folk, especially the older ones, were very fond of baking themselves by the fires; that is to say, of sitting or of lying close to the fire with their clothes off, in order to get their body thoroughly warmed through. They would also at the same time have their bodies, especially their backs, rubbed with hard cloths—an office which the children liked to perform. If the fires had been lighted for this special object, they were called *bakeldar*, or baking fires. They used to undergo this baking operation for the sake of cleanliness and of health, just as the people in Iceland used to bathe in the hot springs with the same object in view; or in bath-rooms specially arranged for the purpose; or in large vessels, which were sometimes furnished with a lid, in order to retain the warmth the better.

When sitting by the fires in the evening, they in general used no other light than that which the glare of these afforded. Occasionally, besides these, they would use torches made of resinous pine; or, on rare occasions,

tapers, though these latter do not seem to have come into vogue, even among the king's retainers, till the days of King Olaf Kyrre. On retiring for the night, they would put the fires out, taking care, however, to leave some smouldering ashes for re-kindling them the following morning. For though they were acquainted with the use of flint and steel, and even of more ingenious methods for procuring a light, it was as little the custom then as it is even now in several parts of the country to use these means of ignition, except in extraordinary cases, such, for instance, as on a journey, &c. Sometimes they left one or more torches burning through the night. These seem to have been secured to a kind of candlestick, and then hoisted up under the roof, or else to have been put in hanging lanterns of transparent horn.

People of rank were very fond of having their feet gently rubbed when they went to bed until they fell asleep; and this duty, as well as that of washing the feet, was performed by the women.

The old Northmen had two principal meals. The first was called *dagverður* or *dögurður*, day meal, which they took in the forenoon, probably towards noon, so that it corresponded to the dinner of the present day. After this meal it was customary for them to enjoy a short siesta. The other meal was called *náttverður*, or night meal, and was taken at or about bedtime. This latter meal was considered to be the principal one, and there was an abundant supply of food and drink at it.

Besides these, they used probably also to take refresh-



ments at other times during the day: for instance, on getting up in the morning; but the old Sagas make no mention of these minor meals: probably they were not taken by the whole of the household assembled together, as was the case, at least among well-to-do people, at dinner and supper. These meals, and especially supper, were taken by the fires in the *skáli*, or keeping-room. The master of the house would take his "high seat," while the rest of the men-folk seated themselves on the long benches in a certain order. The nearer the place was to the "high seat," the greater the honour attached to it. Before the meal they used to wash their hands, either before taking their seats or after, in which case one of the women would bring some water in a basin (*mundlaug*) and a towel to each man. Thereupon *váru borð upptekin*, that is to say, several narrow tables were arranged along the length of the floor, in front of the benches, and between them and the fires.

The table placed in front of the "high seat" was called *hásætisborð*, or "high seat table." The others were termed *skutill*. Wealthy people would have tablecloths made of white linen laid on the tables, at least before the most distinguished of the company. Thereupon the food was taken from the large cauldrons that hung over the fires, and placed upon the tables. Solid food was put on dishes (*diskar*) or plates, generally consisting merely of wooden platters, though sometimes they are spoken of as having been made of metal, or even of silver. Each person used to cut it with his *tollekniv*.

Forks do not seem to have been used ; fingers, therefore, served instead. The bread was usually baked in loaves (*hleifar*) and was broken in pieces.

The porridge was served in troughs (*trygill*), and eaten with spoons of wood, horn, or bone (*spónn* or *spánn*). Milk and other liquids were served in *askar*, a kind of low wide wooden cans with covers to them, or in bowls (*bollar*) generally made of wood, out of which they drank. Undoubtedly it was often the case for several to use the same dish or trough.

In olden times the food was of a simple description, and though the dishes were not numerous, there was plenty of it. Flesh and fish were eaten fresh or dried. Roast dishes were considered to be delicacies that only appeared on the tables of the wealthy. Milk was used either in its natural form as a drink, or warmed up ; or, and as was most generally the case, as *skyr* ; that is, curdled and separated from the whey. In this curdled condition it used to be kept in vessels or skin bags from summer until winter.

Ale or milk was the usual drink at meals. In some places, as, for instance, at King Sigurd Syr's establishment at Ringerike, ale was used with meat, milk with fish ; and this was the fare on alternate days ; but where there was a superabundance, ale was drunk at the two principal meals. A more expensive drink, and one which was only used at banquets or on other extraordinary occasions, was mead, which, in order to be made more intoxicating, was occasionally flavoured with certain herbs.

Wine was rarely used. An inferior drink, and one used by the lower classes, was whey, sour milk, or butter-milk. In large establishments, ale was brought in in a large vessel called *skapker*, and was placed on a buffet that stood by itself, called the *trapiza*. From this vessel they used to fill their drinking-horns, beakers, or bowls. Rich people used not unfrequently to have their drinking-horns mounted with silver, or even gold, and set with precious stones. On festive occasions these were rubbed up and so highly polished that one could see through them almost as readily as if they had been of glass; sometimes they were furnished with metal feet, so that they could set them on one side with some of their contents still in them; sometimes without any feet, so that they had to be drained off before being set down. The bowls were generally made of wood, not unfrequently of an expensive foreign wood (*mösurbollar*), mounted in silver, and furnished with a silver handle bent over it. Sometimes they were made entirely of silver or of other metal. Beakers with foot-pieces are rarely mentioned; they were probably the same kind of vessel as the *kaleikr*, or chalice, a name borrowed from a foreign language. The drinking vessels and everything else that appertained to the arrangements of the table was called under one head, *borðbúnaðr*, table utensils. Each man did not have a separate drinking vessel to himself, but two, or often more, made use of the same between them. In small households ale was measured out at each meal. Where, however, there was a superabundance, this measuring out only took place at the

morning meal; at the evening meal, *var úmælt drukkit*, i.e., each man drank as much as he liked. In such cases they used to continue drinking after the tables had been removed, and they seldom retired to bed without a debauch taking place. The lower free servants did not take any part in these drinking bouts; much less, therefore, did the serfs.

The women generally acted as waiters, passing to and fro between the tables and the fires. The so-called *mat-selja* (*vide* p. 103) appears to have seen to the victuals being placed upon the table. It does not appear to have been customary for the women to sit in order at the tables as the men did; they rather employed themselves in waiting on the latter while eating. Amongst the wealthiest "bönder," however, and at the houses of chiefs, there used frequently to be an exception in this respect; and, as in the oldest times, the preparation of the food and the arrangement of the tables devolved upon the serfs.

The daily manner of life in the king's house resembled in the main that which has been described above, only that a far greater number of individuals, and amongst them several persons of rank, were daily assembled there, involving, therefore, a housekeeping on a more extensive scale, and imparting as imposing an air to their everyday life as a banquet did in a bonde's house. Even during the time that Norway was divided into a number of petty kingdoms, the kings would have a large number of men skilled in the exercise of weapons round them, who were

partly called their house-“*karls*” (churls) partly their *hird* (retinue). The chief object of having such a large establishment doubtless was that they should always have a number of doughty champions about them, to form a safe protection at home in case of any hostile attack, or to compose the flower of their band on their Viking expeditions. If the king whom they served, however, was rather an advocate of peaceful occupations than a warrior, they were not permitted to remain idle when at home, but had to make themselves of use by taking their part in the usual farming work.

But when Norway came to be a united monarchy, the same state of things could exist no longer as of old, when the country was divided into a number of petty sovereignties. For, on the one hand, his estates were too numerous and too widely spread over the country for him to be able to have the immediate superintendence of them, so that this office had to be deputed to his *armenn*, or stewards. And, on the other hand, numbers of distinguished persons from all quarters of the country assembled round his person, entering his service as warriors and as counsellors in the government of the country, and no longer in the light of simple workpeople. The term *hird* now received a meaning of higher importance, and the royal household consisted of several classes.

The most ancient subdivision, which doubtless dates from the days of King Harald the Fair-haired, was—

1st. The *hirdmenn*, who were of necessity men of good birth, polished manners, and of approved bravery.

Their business was to keep guard over the king's person, and to impart an air of splendour to royalty.

2nd. The *gestir*, or guests. These kept the outer guard, performed the king's errands, and ranked next to the *hirdmenn*. Only these two classes were properly ranked among the *hird*.

3rd. House-churls (*karl*), who had to perform the usual farm work, but who were also well skilled in the use of weapons. And, finally, a number of serfs, whose duty it was to perform the most menial offices, and who, of course, still less than the churls, were reckoned among the *hirdmenn*.

The number of which the free portion of the household (in distinction to the serfs) consisted, and which in the days of St. Olaf always surrounded the king's person, and followed him on his journeys through his dominions, was sixty *hirdmenn*, thirty *gestir*, and thirty "churls," and this continued to be the case till the days of King Olaf Kyrre.

In the large *hirðstofa*, "hird"-room, where all the arrangements were according to the old fashion, and where fires were burnt along the length of the floor, the king used to sit in person on the "high seat"—on the higher long bench (*æðri bekk*)—facing the sun, that is, towards the south. Next to him, on the right, sat the bishop of the "hird" and the clergy, and on the left his temporal counsellors. Provided there was room enough, the "hird"-men also used to sit on this bench, arranged in order according to their age and renown; the most illustrious being nearer to the "high seat," and those

of less repute at a greater distance. On the opposite, or lower long bench, the king's most esteemed counsellor took his seat, generally the master of the horse, and on either side of him the *gestir*, arranged as before. If any of the "hird"-men sat on this bench, they took their place on the left of the master of the horse, which in this case was considered the most honourable position. The "house-churls" are not mentioned as sitting in the "hird" apartment; probably it was not customary for them to do so as they had a room especially to themselves. But if ever they had to be present in the "hird" apartment, their place doubtless was below that of the *gestir*, to the right of the master of the horse. If the queen were present, she would sit on the king's left, and her ladies would sit below her on the same bench; or, if there were more than this could conveniently hold, the remainder had to sit on the right of the master of the horse, arranged in the same order as the men. The lowest place on either side was considered to be that which was nearest to the door, of which, as has already been stated, there were generally two, one at either end of the apartment. The same custom was observed when the king was banqueting.

Their meal times were the same as in the case of the "bönder," or peasants; the arrangement, too, and the character of their food was similar, except that in both respects it was more costly. In the royal establishment the food was generally prepared in a separate building, called *steikarahús*, or kitchen, where the cooks, who in olden times were doubtless always serfs, discharged their

duties under the superintendence of an overseer or head cook (*steikarahöfðingi*). The pouring out of the drinks was undertaken by servants, named *skenkjarar* (pourers), who filled the drinking-horns from the large vessel (*skap-ker*), and carried them round to the guests. The king would drink to the person who sat in the "high seat" opposite to him, and this was accounted to be a great honour. On these occasions the drinking-horn would be carried from the one to the other of the parties between the fires. Very often each man drank with his neighbour, and vied with him in seeing which could drink the most. Generally at the king's own table, that is at the table of the "high seat," there used to be served a superior kind of food than at the other tables; and it was considered to be an honour when the king sent a dish from his own table to one or other of the persons present.

At a sign from the king the meal ended; and if he was stingy, he gave this sign as soon as he could. Thus, it is told of King Harold Haardraade, who, with all his great qualities, often displayed a very niggardly disposition, that he would knock on the table with his knife, as soon as he had eaten as much as he wanted, when the attendants immediately set about clearing the tables, and thus many had to go away hungry. In other respects this king, though he had travelled much in foreign lands, adhered to the old manner of living, and the old domestic customs. But when there was a drinking bout, he would not allow any one to shirk his drink, unless he had given him special exemption.



At Christmas time one of the amusements of the "hird" consisted in appointing drinking forfeits for any trivial errors any of the company may have committed; and those who had become amenable to them had to sit on the floor among the straw, while they emptied the "forfeit horn." If any one proved obstinate, and refused to drink the portion allotted to him, the king would very often carry the filled horn to him, and then evasion was impossible.

From the days of Olaf Kyrre the housekeeping of the Norwegian kings was carried on on a more expensive scale, and the number of the household was increased. This king was generally attended by a hundred and twenty *hirdmenn*, sixty *gestir*, and as many "house-churls." Stoves, too, usurped the place of the fires, and the floor was now paved or floored instead of being, as before, only of beaten earth. The arrangement of the seats was also altered. The king's "high seat" was removed to the cross-bench, or, as it was called now, the high-bench. The queen sat on his left, when present. Further down in the room were the *stallara-stóll*, where the equerries and other valiant chieftains sat, facing the "high seat." Between the tables in front of these two seats, the *trapiza*, or buffet was placed during meal times. Beakers usurped the place of the old drinking-horns, and the custom of drinking with the person who sat opposite became obsolete, as every man drank "skaal" (health) with whomsoever he pleased. Certain of the "hird"-men named *Skutils-*

*veinar* (from *skutill*, table), or attendants at the table, had to wait at the royal table; they were considered to rank above the other "hird"-men. Amongst these, again, were elected one or two officers, whose special duty it was to superintend the viands; but it is not known for certain whether these appointments were already in existence in the days of King Olaf Kyrre, or whether they were of more recent date. Others had to hold lighted candles before the king's table; the number of candles varying according to the number of royal personages who might be sitting at table: one candle for each person who was not of lower rank than a "Jarl." These attendants were called "taper-bearers" (*kertisveinar*, from *kerti*, a candle).

Thus in the days of Olaf, there arose two new classes in the "hird." Afterwards, when the table attendants, as the chief of the "hird," came to occupy a post of importance in the State, their duties connected with the royal household gradually fell into disuse; and it was only on special occasions, when the king desired to display all the magnificence of royalty, that they officiated at table. The officers, too, that were elected from among these, as mentioned above, from being merely a kind of house-stewards, as in the fourteenth century, were now promoted to the dignity of first statesmen in the kingdom. The "taper-bearers," however, continued, it seems, to be considered as royal pages; but when young men of noble descent and refined manners were elected to fill these offices, only till they should be promoted to higher

appointments in the service of the State, their attendance at table was also limited to particular occasions.

The organization of the "hird" made in the days of Olaf Kyrre remained long in vogue. In other respects it is probable that the number of the "hird"-men, as well as that of the *gestir*, and "house-churls," was greatly increased at a later date; but only some few of them were on duty about the king's person at a time, while the others were dispersed about the country on State business.

Towards the close of the twelfth century the different classes composing the royal establishment were separated from each other by a more decided line of demarcation than had probably been the case in more ancient days. The "Kongespeil," written about that date, bears testimony to this. It appears that the "house-churls" ate their meals apart from the rest of the "hird," and that the *gestir* did not even eat in company with the king and the "hird"-men, except on great and solemn occasions, such as at Christmas and Easter. The "hird"-men, however, always took their meals in the same room with the king. In the days of King Magnus Erlingsson, it is related that a rather violent scene occurred in the "hird," because the king, while spending Christmas at Bergen, had ordered meat to be served to the "hird"-men in the large "hird" apartment of the royal palace, while the *gestir* only had ale served to them in another room. The king, who came to the door in order to put an end to the uproar, was very nearly killed; and the "hird"-men, of whom the few who happened to be in attendance that day

only were armed, had great difficulty in defending themselves, and had even to break the stoves up in order to arm themselves with the bricks and stones of which they were built. At length, the king's "house-churls" came to the rescue, and with the addition of several of the burghers and others, the fray was put an end to. But many of the *gestir* had to suffer death, or mutilation, for their riotous behaviour.

The "Kongespeil" gives prominent notice to the custom that had to be observed in those days when any one appeared before the king, either for the purpose of being received among the "hird," or of waiting in attendance upon him. First of all he had to get some one or other belonging to the "hird" to introduce him, and represent his case; from him, too, he learnt when it would be most convenient for him to appear before His Majesty; and if this should happen to be when the king was sitting at table, it was considered best to choose the time when His Majesty had eaten and drunk as much as he required. The individual who was to be presented had then to dress his head and his beard, put on his state dress, and, escorted by an attendant, repair to the king's quarters. On arriving at the door, he divested himself of his cape and cap. If the attendant had permission to accompany him into the room, he might not go further than just within the door, or at least as far as the seat of the master of the horse. The person to be presented had now to bow low before the king, and address him in the following words:—"God give you a good day, sir

king!" It was not considered respectful to approach too near to the king, still less to lean one's hand on his table while speaking to him; but rather to keep at such a distance from the table (or, in case there were no table, from the foot-stool in front of the "high seat") that the attendants could pass to and fro without hindrance. While standing in this position, it was considered correct for the person to clasp his right hand round the left wrist, and then let his arms assume the position they would do if allowed to fall naturally of themselves. In conversing with the king, care had also to be taken to address him in the plural number, while equal care had to be taken not to use the plural of oneself. Also great caution had to be used, supposing the person to be presented did not properly understand what the king had said, not to ask again with a "Hah!" or "Hoh!" or "What?" but only to say "Sire?" or, if one preferred using more words, "Sire, be not angry that I ask again what you said to me, for I did not rightly comprehend!"

In the thirteenth century, the pomp and the ceremonies observed at the court of the Norwegian kings considerably increased. Dating from the reign of King Magnus Lagaböter, it appears that the "table attendants" received the rank of knights, and were addressed as "Sir," and that after they had thus begun to rank as prominent members of the State, the duties they had previously been in the habit of performing became gradually obsolete.

Hardly anything is known of the domestic life of the later kings before the Calmar Union.

Regarding the peculiarities of town life in Norway in the olden days, the Sagas and ancient laws have made but little mention ; and, as has been said before, it did not differ very greatly from that followed in the country. Contemporaneously with the mercantile towns, the so-called *skytningar* seem to have sprung into existence. They were a kind of hostelry, where merchants and seafaring men repaired, and where they could partake of refreshment on paying for it. *Oldrhús*, that is "ale-houses," or "drinking-rooms," was, undoubtedly, only another name for them. These places seem to have been frequently the scene of bloody encounters, even between chieftains.

The Northmen of olden time, both in Norway and in Iceland, used to travel a great deal by sea and by land, partly on mercantile matters, and partly for the purpose of visiting far distant friends and relatives. In a country like Norway, it was natural that advantage should be taken of the sea route whenever an opportunity for so doing presented itself. Navigation was at a very early date—even from the remotest times to which the history and traditions of the country refer—in a high state of perfection ; and it was easier to carry all the necessaries with one on board ship than it was by land. The vessels of the Northmen, even the small ones, were usually furnished with a kind of awning, which was used at night when lying to in harbour, and which afforded a sufficient shelter. They carried, moreover, a supply of provisions.

Land journeys, however, and not unfrequently rather

extensive ones, could not always be avoided. As the roads were bad, they were generally performed on horseback during the summer. Everything relating to a horseman's equipment, such as *beitsl*, bits; *saðull*, saddle; *stigreip*, stirrups; *sporar*, spurs; *hestajárn*, horse-shoes, &c., &c., was in use among the Northmen from the remotest times. People of distinction used to pride themselves on having all their equipments in first-rate style; and painted saddles, inlaid with silver and set with stones, costly bits and saddle trappings, are frequently mentioned. Women used to ride as well as men; their saddles were of the common chair form still used in many parts of the country. Goods and provisions, moreover, were generally conveyed on horseback in panniers. Wagons (*vagn*) and carts (*kerra*), though mentioned, were certainly but seldom used. For the conveyance of sick people a kind of palanquin was sometimes used, which was suspended between two horses.

In winter, when there was plenty of snow on the ground, means of communication were more numerous. At this season they would travel on "ski," and drag a small sledge (*kjálki*) with them, on which they placed their goods and provisions. They used, moreover, sledges drawn by horses or oxen; sometimes an awning was spread over the sledge, when women or sickly people had to travel, or when the weather was bad. Men, however, it appears, preferred travelling on "ski," or riding on horseback, to sledging.

There was but little public provision made in those

days for the convenience of travellers. Certainly, when the road lay over desolate mountain tracts, or across uninhabited districts, occasional buildings (*sáluhús*) might be found here and there, where wayfaring people could find shelter and fuel, but where, generally speaking, no one resided. Travellers, therefore, had in a great measure to rely on private hospitality, whereby the absence of public places of entertainment was in a degree remedied. Hospitality was a brilliant trait in the character of the old Northmen. No one who stood in need of shelter, whether he was rich or poor, could be refused admittance without the person refusing drawing down upon himself the reputation of being a niggardly person. On the other hand, it was held to be a great recommendation to the master of a house when it was said of him, "that every one met with hospitality at his house," or "that guest and beggar were entertained there."

When a traveller came to a house it was not customary for him to go directly in, even though the door stood open. He had first to knock at the door, unless he met any of the people of the house outside, and then, after having received an invitation to come in, which rarely failed to follow, he might proceed to enter. If he were well known, the host would himself go out to receive him. They would salute one another with bared heads, and with the words, *heill ok sæll*, "be well and happy." Sometimes they would kiss each other. Women and decrepit old men were lifted down from their horses. When the traveller had come into the house, the first care was to see



that the fires were lighted or made up, and that his wet clothes were removed and dry ones given him in exchange. Here the women of the house busied themselves. When he had thus become dry and thoroughly warm, he was shown to a seat, and if he were a person of rank or distinction, the "high seat" opposite to the host was allotted to him, or else a place by his side. There was no stinting of meat and drink.

An ancient poem, called "Haavamaal," recommends these attentions towards the traveller in the following words :—

"Fire he needs  
Who has entered in,  
And is cold about the knees.  
Victuals and clothes  
Does the man require  
Who has travelled over the Fjelds."

It was considered a distinguished mark of regard when the host and hostess gave up their bed to a traveller. If the traveller was a stranger to the people of the house, it was considered incompatible with the laws of hospitality to worm out of him his name or his business. Even persons who were known to the family were not interrogated about their business; and it was usual, if the traveller had a message to the people of the house, first to come out with it as he was on the point of going away. No unpleasant news was allowed to interfere with the mirth of the house while the stranger remained, or render his perhaps forced sojourn there more unpleasant to him. On the other hand, in order to afford a guarantee against

the abuse of hospitality, it was considered to be unbecoming for a traveller to remain more than three nights at one place, unless specially invited.

Voluntarily to assist the traveller in the matter of a change of horses, &c., was considered to be one of the duties of hospitality. Moreover, it was the usual custom for the host, where the new arrival was an acquaintance, to set him some distance on the road on his departure; and it was then customary for him first to acquaint him with his business.

Poor people, also, used to enjoy the rights of hospitality. Vagrants and beggars found a reception and assistance in the houses of chieftains as well as under the peasant's roof. In the oldest times they used to have admission into the *skáli*, even in king's houses, during meal times, when they were allowed to sit in the straw near the door, where they devoured what was handed to them from the tables. In large houses they were admitted into the "guest-house," or else received shelter for the night in a barn.

The Sagas are not devoid of instances of an exaggerated, one might almost say ridiculous, hospitality. Thus it is related of the Norwegian woman Geirrid, who went over from Haalogaland to Iceland, and settled there, that she built her *skáli* right across the public road, and that she herself used to sit in the doorway on a chair, and invited all travellers to come in; and that refreshment always stood ready served on a table inside.

Another Northman, Thorbrand, who migrated to Iceland,

is said to have built so large an *eldhús* (fire-house) that all persons travelling through the valley where he lived could pass through it with their horses and pack-saddles, while victuals stood in readiness for every one.

The old Northmen were as earnest in friendship as they were in enmity—

“ A friend one shall prove  
To his friend,  
To him and his friend ;  
But no man  
Shall show friendship  
To his friend's enemy.”

says an old verse ; and in another place—

“ Dost thou know a friend's sorrow ?  
Make it thine own sorrow ;  
And give no peace to thine enemies.”

From such forms of thought sprung those intimate friendships of which the old Sagas afford so many illustrations, as well as those bitter family feuds, those numerous and deadly encounters arising out of a desire of vengeance, a delineation of which forms the principal contents of these same Sagas. To the honour of our ancestors, however, it must be said that the Sagas also afford numerous instances of a spirit of generosity and of reconciliation having been evinced between enemies, and that the whole tenor of the laws relating to homicide displays an earnest endeavour, so far as the character of the people and the spirit of the age would permit, to repress the avenging of blood, and to put a stop to the infinite perpetuity of family quarrels. For although the

relatives of the slain man were not bound in olden times to relinquish their claims for vengeance when the slayer offered to pay a penalty—and many a son scorned “to carry the avengement of his father in his purse,”—still, it was the public opinion that it was as honourable to receive a good round sum, especially when men of approved respectability and honour acted as mediators, as to demand life for life. But to allow relatives to lie slain, or even to put up with insults, without obtaining the payment of a mulct, or without demanding vengeance, was considered to be unworthy of any man of honour.

An alliance of friendship, based on religious grounds, and considered to be indissoluble, was often contracted in the old pagan times. These alliances were generally formed between young men, who had either passed the days of childhood together in unity and mutual love, or owing to some chance occurrence, such as, for instance, a Vikingr expedition, in which they were brought a great deal together, and had learned to respect and appreciate each other's good qualities. The religious ceremonies attached to this “sworn brotherhood,” and the obligations it imposed upon the contracting parties, are mentioned in several places in the old Sagas. The two (or more) persons who wished to enter into this brotherhood had to cut three strips of turf (*jarð-armen*), which they raised aloft into the air by means of a spear placed under the middle of the strips, both ends of which, however, rested on the ground. Thereupon they repaired underneath the strips of turf, and inflicted a wound in the palm of

their hands, so that their blood flowed together into a little pool under the middle of the turf. After this they knelt down, and, laying their hands together, swore, invoking the gods to be witnesses, that if either of them suffered a violent death, the survivor should avenge him as if he were his own brother. The imposed conditions that the "brother" who lived the longest should sit for three nights by the grave of the deceased was but seldom observed, and must most probably be considered to have been one of those mythical embellishments of pagan customs which were rife in the later ages of Christianity. The bitterest quarrels often resulted in a compact of brotherhood, the disregard of which was looked upon with the utmost contempt.

In the days of paganism, it occasionally happened that a man would refuse to survive his friend, and voluntarily followed him to death. The renowned and noble Norwegian chief, Ingemund Thorsteinsson, who had settled down in Vatsdal, in Iceland, lived on the most intimate terms of friendship with two other Northmen, Eyvind Sörkver and Gaut, who dwelt near by. When Ingemund was slain, and news of his death had reached Eyvind, he fell upon his sword, and with his dying breath bade his foster-son acquaint his friend Gaut with what he had done. When Gaut heard it he exclaimed, "Life does not become Ingemund's friend!" and immediately followed Eyvind's example.

It was one of the duties of friendship for friends to pay frequent visits to each other whenever opportunities for

doing so presented themselves. Thus an old poem says:—

“Hast thou a friend  
In whom thou canst trust?  
Go often to find him;  
For the road along which no one travels  
Is overgrown with brambles  
And with high grass.”

If friends were separated so widely apart from each other that mutual visits between them could not often be made, they used to avail themselves of any opportunity of sending each other verbal messages—for the interchange of letters was unknown in those days—and these messages were usually accompanied with presents. If it was any important matter that one friend wished to communicate to another, or if he wished to recommend the bearer to his friend's special protection and notice, he would give him something or other to take with him, with which his friend was well acquainted, and at the sight of which he could not fail to be convinced that the bearer had actually come from the person he pretended to have come from, and that he enjoyed his confidence. Such a sign or token was called a *jartein*, and generally consisted of a ring, a weapon, or, above all, a jewel,—mostly, one which had been presented to the sender of the message by the friend to whom he now sent it as a token. Frequently, for the sake of greater precaution, the messenger had to mention to the person to whom the message was sent some circumstance or other in connection with the token sent, and which was known only to the two friends.

Sometimes, also, it was the case that the token was nothing more than the mere communication of such a secret. In those days, when the art of writing was not much used, the token served in the stead of the sealed letters of a later date. For Runes, scratched on batons (*kefli*), or on wooden plates (*spjald*), did not afford the same protection against forgery, unless a private and intricate system of Runic signs, known only to a very few, was adopted.

Sometimes a special token was provided for a special case; for instance, if a man wished to warn his friend against some great and impending danger.

A story is told of Gisle Sursson, of Iceland, that he cast a coin, consisting of two pieces, which could be separated from each other, and again made to adhere together by the means of small nails distributed on either piece, so that it appeared to be an entire piece. He kept one piece himself and handed the other over to his friend Vestein, with the mutual understanding that neither of them should send the token to the other unless the life of either of them were in danger.

The old Northmen gave their enmity vent either by assaulting, killing, or insulting the party who had excited their indignation, or by offering him studied insults. If the blow could not be made to fall upon the enemy in person, his innocent relatives or servants had often to suffer for him; and the thirst for vengeance was quenched in their blood. Secret assassinations, which the perpetrator would not acknowledge, and which in the ancient language were

termed *morð*, were of rare occurrence, and were considered to be an infamous crime, that branded the murderer with the detested name of *morðingi*, murderer, or *moðvargr*, murder-wolf; and, according to pagan notions, would be punished in another life with the torments of "Naaströnd." The murderer was in honour bound to make a public announcement of the crime, unless it had been committed in the presence of witnesses.

Even though there might be circumstances connected with the case that might appear to give the homicide reasonable grounds for omitting to publish his guilt, as, for instance, when he had killed a person in order to avenge some murder that had been committed by him, still it was seldom that he omitted to insinuate indirectly that it was his deed. With reference to the frequent destruction of life by arson, it was usual to allow the women, domestic servants, and often some of the males belonging to the family, against whom they owed no grudge, and whose vengeance was not to be dreaded, liberty to leave the house before it was set on fire. But if a man invidiously burnt up his enemy, together with his whole household, he was branded with the ignominious title of "*brennuvargr*," fire-wolf, and was ranked in the same class with a murderer.

Among the insults by which one sought to take vengeance on an enemy, prominent notice must be given to the so-called "Nid." The Northmen used to distinguish between two kinds of "Nid," namely, *tunguníð*, insulting words; and *treníð*, insulting pictures, which were generally scratched on, or carved out of wood.



Insulting epithets are frequently applied in poetical compositions—in the *níðvisun* or “nid” verses, to which, in addition to the ignominy they conveyed, was ascribed a kind of magic power. *Treníð*, or insulting pictures, were sketched out or erected at conspicuous places, especially on the enemy’s property. The so-called *níðstöng*, or “nid”-pole, must especially be noticed among this latter kind of “nid.” A degree of magic power was also attached to it, by which it was supposed that the tutelary spirits of the property or family were frightened away, and thus misfortune would be sure to overtake them. This pole consisted of a stout rod, generally, with a horse’s head fastened on to it, the mouth of which was wide open; or else the entire carcase of some animal was fixed to it. When it was set up, imprecations and insults were heaped on the enemy’s head. Other “nid” pictures corresponded more to the caricatures of later days, and represented the party attacked in a derisive or degrading manner. And sometimes, lastly, they also had a picture of the detested individual at hand, on which they would heap the insults they were unable to offer to the person himself. The old Norwegian laws strictly forbade all kinds of “nid,” and even attached the punishment of outlawry to the transgressor.

While Christianity, on the one hand, gradually caused the old heathen compacts of brotherhood to fall into disuse, and naturally, therefore, more speedily did away with the less common custom of voluntary suicide on the death of a friend; so, on the other hand, it undoubtedly contributed to assuage the violent outbreaks of private enmity,

which in the days of paganism frequently disturbed the public peace. It was not, however, able entirely to do away with the desire for vengeance that was so deeply rooted in the national character, and was so closely allied to its ideas of justice, that revenge and law were in fact synonymous terms. The civil wars that raged fiercely in Norway, and still more fiercely in Iceland, in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, gave a fresh life and a fresh impetus to the greed for vengeance; and it cannot be denied that the cruelties that were practised in these feuds, especially on the last-named island, and the marked absence of any steadfast fidelity in friendship that prevailed, call forth a feeling of repugnance that such enmities should have existed between Christian men, which even the bloody deeds of the old pagans do not evoke in nearly so great a degree.

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## CHAPTER VI.

### AMUSEMENTS.

THE amusements of the Northmen in the olden time may be very conveniently classed under the following heads:—

1. Banquets; 2. Athletic Sports and Military Exercises;
3. Games; 4. Dramatic Representations; 5. Gambling;
6. Music; 7. The Chase, and other pastimes of a similar nature.

1. Banqueting (*samkunda*), or, as it was generally termed, *drykkja*, or drinking bout, or, in other words, ale, because drinking (especially of ale) was the principal

feature, shall be first described. Otherwise banqueting was distinguished by different terms, according to the manner in which it was held. Thus, *samburðaröl*, i.e., subscription banquet; *hvirfingsdrykkja*, i.e., a banquet held turn in turn about by the different bönder (peasants) in a certain district; *heimboð*, or *vinaboð*, a banquet to which a man invited his relations and friends; *blótveitsla* sacrificial feasts; *bruðkaupsveitsla*, wedding feasts; *erfisöla*, arvel; \* *burtferðaröl*, a feast which a person gave just before taking a journey; *heimkomuöl*, a feast to celebrate a happy return home. Again, others received their names from the season of the year at which they were held, as *jólaveitsla*, Christmas banquet; *haustboð*, autumn banquet, which was held in autumn, when the work of summer was over.

At some of these different kinds of feasts different customs obtained; but these peculiarities, in so far as they are of any importance and are generally known, have partly been alluded to before, as, for instance, in wedding festivities; or will be described later on, in the funeral entertainments. Especial notice will here be given to the so-called *heimboð*, or *vinaboð*, as being the most general feasts held, and as the customs observed in them will, in their principal features, be found to repeat themselves in all the others.

The very name of this kind of banquet implies that they were held after invitation previously given (*boð*), which usually was sent out a tolerably long time—often

\* Arvel, an old Yorkshire word for a funeral entertainment.—Ed.

several months—beforehand, in order that the guests might have a convenient opportunity for making the necessary arrangements, especially when they had a long distance to go. The invitation was either sent to each guest separately at his own house, or generally to a whole body, as, for instance, to a party assembled at another banquet, or at some public assembly. The time at which the feast was to be held, and the number of days it would last, was also stated; and sometimes a notice was appended that none of the guests would be allowed to take their departure empty-handed. The preparations for the banquet consisted in slaughtering animals, in brewing ale, and in procuring all kinds of victuals and drink. The walls of the banqueting-room were hung with tapestry (*tjöld*), the benches covered with cushions, and the table utensils were cleaned up. The floor had to be strewed with haulm, the fires lighted, the buffet set in order, and the vessels filled with ale brought in. The guests seem usually to have arranged their journey in such a manner that they arrived in the afternoon or towards the evening of the day on which the banquet was to begin.

Certain of the people of the house, of either sex, were selected to assist the guests on their arrival, and subsequently to wait at table. They were said *at ganga um beina*, that is, to see that the guests were comfortable. One or more of the men-servants of the house had to take charge of the horses and the weapons of the visitors; for they usually travelled armed. On the arrival of the guests, women were in readiness to take the travelling

clothes and articles of finery which the lady portion of the visitors had brought with them, and which they would require to use in decorating themselves for the feast. Merrily and busily went on the reception of the guests, while the cooking operations were being carried on in the very room where they were received. Little by little, after the greater number had arrived, quiet was restored; and now each person took the seat shown him, the men on the long benches and the women on the cross-bench. It was a most important matter, this affair of arranging the guests in their seats, according to their rank and reputation! Any neglect therein was very likely to give rise to great discontent, and even to bitter hostilities. The host, if he was a man of repute, generally occupied the principal high seat; the only exception to this rule being when a king, or a "jarl," or some other great man, honoured the banquet with his presence, in which case the post of honour was assigned to him. The seat of honour on the cross-bench was occupied by the most distinguished lady present, as the hostess, unless she were of high rank herself, usually busied herself with seeing to the comfort of her guests. If the company was larger than the fixed benches along the walls could conveniently hold, a row of benches was brought in and arranged in front of them. These were called *forsæti*, or front seats. Besides these, chairs were used. When everybody was at last settled in his place, the host "pronounced peace over the meeting." A little time after this, water for washing was taken round to every guest, very

frequently by the mistress of the house herself. Thereupon the tables were set out; and, in case there was a double row of benches, those who sat on the outer seats occupied the further side of the table, so that their backs were towards the fire. If the king, or a "jarl," or some other distinguished chief were present, and occupied the "high seat," the host would sometimes seat himself on a separate stool, on the outer side of the tables at which his distinguished guest and chief followers were placed, in order that he might thus wait on them the better, and be able to converse with them. When stoves became more general, one or more rows of tables were arranged along the length of the room on these occasions. The food was now set on, and after they had partaken of a small quantity, drinks were carried round either by the women of the house or by some of the men, who were called *skjenkjarar*, or *byrlarar*, over whom was appointed a foreman, whose business it was to see that they performed their duty properly. Drinking was generally continued after the victuals and the tables had been removed, and "skaals," or toasts, were given, either by the host or by some other person deputed by him to do so. In pagan days, toasts were drunk to the memory of the deities; in Christian times to the memory of Christ, the Virgin Mary, and other saints. Doubtless a certain order was observed in proposing them.

Besides this, they drank *sveitardrykkja*, or "rotation toasts," so that everybody drank an equal quantity; or else one person would drink a toast with another, so that

he half emptied a beaker or horn, and then either carried or sent the remaining half to the challenged person, who had to drink off the remainder; or else two side or opposite neighbours would join together for the whole evening, and drink one against the other, in order to see who could drink the most. This was called at *drekka tvimennig*. Sometimes men and women sat promiscuously together, and drank *tvimennig* in couples; not that the woman had to drink an equal quantity with the man, but still, according to the testimony of the old Sagas, frequently more than was good for her. On the whole, the women encouraged the men to drink; and whenever the hostess or her daughter showed one of the guests the distinguished honour of approaching him with a full horn, and drinking to him, or to the health of his family, he could not, naturally, refuse to quaff it off. Drinking fines (*víti*) were, therefore, often introduced, in order to promote the hilarity of the occasion. For instance, if any guest omitted to observe an established custom, or shirked his drink, he was condemned to drink off a horn as a forfeit. It was considered to be grand when the liquors which were served were stronger and of better quality as the evening advanced; thus, for instance, when mead, and finally, wine succeeded ale, it was deemed very sumptuous. The results of such liberal treatment may readily be imagined. The men often became intoxicated to a degree, and did not always conduct themselves in the most becoming manner when in this state. The solemn "pronunciation of peace"

(*griðasetning*), which took place at the commencement of the festivities, was very necessary, as it placed some restraint on the guests, and in a manner, prevented scenes of violence from occurring; still, for all that, many a quarrel and many a battle ensued. On such occasions, as the guests wore no weapons about them, the combatants would make use of their fists, drinking-horns, or bones from which the meat had been picked, or in fact, anything that came to hand. The host, with the assistance of his other and more peacefully disposed guests, had thereupon to interpose; and here the women rendered good service; for they would catch hold of the most boisterous ones, or in case the combatants had by chance got hold of weapons, would throw a cloth over them in order to prevent their doing a mischief to each other. Generally, the parties became readily reconciled after having slept their debauch out; and it was seldom that either of the combatants who held himself to be insulted went so far as to quit the banquet at once, and set out home, accompanied by his friends and companions. The drinking not unusually resulted in the men falling asleep on their seats, or in the beds behind them, or else in their rolling off into the straw, where they would remain till the next morning.

Those of the guests who had some control over themselves still left, were shown to the beds appointed for them. But, even after they had retired for the night, they often had to quaff off a horn or two, which the hostess, or one of the women of the house, would bring



them, while she seated herself the while by their bedside, and entertained them with her conversation.

The mirth seems to have been at the highest on the first evening of the banquet; for the host made it a point of honour to see that all his guests were right merry. The following day, when the company were once more astir, and had gathered together in the banqueting-room, the first business was to smooth over any quarrels that might have taken place during the debauch of the previous evening. When this was satisfactorily arranged, the drinking began anew. Generally on this day, the drinking was not carried to so great an extent, neither was the hilarity of so noisy a description as before; but towards evening the same scenes would be enacted over again; and thus it continued as long as the banquet lasted.

But it must not be supposed that an immoderate love of drinking constituted the only pleasure of the banquet. During the day-time athletic exercises, games, and other diversions, which shall be described in their turn, were indulged in; and even in the evening, if another debauch did not again carry all else before it, the company would amuse themselves with different pastimes and diversions of a more becoming nature. Songs were recited or sung; Sagas, both of an authentic and made-up description, were related, or, in later days, read; and riddles were asked. Then there was the so-called *mannjafnaðr*, a game of which the following is a brief description:—Two of the most distinguished people in the country or district were selected (neither of whom generally was present), and a

comparison was made between their valour and qualities, in which every one of the guests present had to say something for one or other of them. Or else each of the guests would compare himself with some one of the company present; a diversion, however, which often degenerated into a dangerous joke, and resulted in bitter feuds.

Finally, amongst the other amusements on these occasions, the *heitstrenging*, or the making solemn vows, must be mentioned. It was a custom that took its rise in the pagan ages, and the vows were registered by quaffing off the *bragafull*, or the toast that was proposed in honour of Brage, the deity that presided over minstrelsy. Every person to whom the "Brage"-horn was presented rose from his seat, placed one foot on the block or footstool in front of his seat, and made his vow, prefacing it with the following words:—"I mount on the block and solemnly swear," &c. Thereupon he drained off the contents of the horn, and resumed his seat. Generally, the vow in question related to the performance of some great achievement, that might be immortalized by means of the minstrel's art. Christmas eve was the usual time for making these vows; though the custom was also observed at sacrificial feasts, weddings, arvel, and at ordinary banquets. It appears to have gradually fallen into disuse as the influence of Christianity became extended, as also did the Brage-horn itself.

The banquets of ancient times were often attended by a large number of persons. When the Norwegian chief,

Thorolf Kveldulfsson, received King Harald the Fair-haired as his guest, at his estate, Sandnes, in Haalogaland, he invited five hundred men in addition to the three hundred that formed the royal retinue; and as none of the habitable houses on the property were large enough to accommodate so great a number, he had a large barn furnished in the most magnificent style as a banqueting-room. The sons of the Landnamsmand Hjalte, of Hof in Hjaltadt, Iceland, entertained no less than twelve hundred guests on their father's death. This last-mentioned banquet is referred to as having been the only one of its kind in Iceland; but it was no rare occurrence for the guests to number several hundreds. Under these circumstances it will be readily understood that the person who gave a banquet, and had not only therefore to entertain, but also to house so many guests, was obliged, even though he were a wealthy man, or a man of rank, to borrow table furniture, bedding, and such things from his friends and neighbours.

Banquets on a large scale lasted some considerable time; for the guests often came from a long distance, and of course did not undertake so arduous and difficult a journey merely for the sake of one evening's or one day's pleasure. Sometimes they would last a week, a fortnight, or even for a longer time. On the other hand, a master of a house did not often hold such banquets. In the days of paganism a chieftain would sometimes hold three in the course of the year, at the principal feasts, viz., at winter's night (Oct. 14), Christmas, and Midsummer.

After the introduction of Christianity, they were changed to the autumn feast at Michaelmastide, the Christmas feast, and the Easter feast. Yet, to hold as many banquets as this was considered to be a proof of a great love of pomp and parade. But it was generally customary for a well-to-do peasant only to give one such large party in the course of the year; and the time usually selected appears to have been either in the autumn or in the period that intervened between the beginning of winter and the end of Christmastide, as it was easier to procure the necessary provisions at these seasons, and people, moreover, were not then so much occupied with farmwork that imperatively required their attention at home.

That which especially tended to make the banquets of olden days very costly and expensive to the host, was the custom of presenting the guests with gifts—a custom that was held, indeed, to be absolutely necessary, if it were desired that the feast should obtain the renown of having been a luxurious and magnificent one. On the day appointed for the termination of the festivities, all the guests made preparations for taking their departure. Their baggage and weapons were handed back to them by those who had had them in their keeping; and their horses, which the host had taken charge of while the banquet lasted, were brought out. Thereupon the master of the house accompanied each of his guests—at all events those who were at all distinguished individuals—a little distance from the house; and at length, on bidding them adieu, presented them with a gift, consisting of a weapon, a decoration, or

a costly garment, &c. This was termed *leiða út með gjöfum*, to conduct out with a gift. The value of the gift was partly adapted in proportion to the rank of the guest, partly measured by the friendly relationship existing between him and the host; neither, perhaps, was the recompense which the latter might expect to receive on a similar occasion quite lost sight of. "Gift always looks to recompense," was a common and ancient proverb.

The above description gives a general idea of the customs observed at the social gatherings (*vinaboð*, *heimboð*) of olden time; and it is very probable that the *kvirfingsdrykkjur*, or rotation feasts, were celebrated in a similar style. Apparently, they were feasts which the principal bönder (peasants) in a certain district had mutually bound themselves to give to each other in turn.

The *samburðaröl*, or subscription gatherings, were, on the other hand, of a more public character, and were generally held at the largest house in the neighbourhood. Here the participators in the feast assembled, each one bringing with him his contribution of provisions, &c.; and the principal person of the company present took upon himself to discharge the duties of host with regard to toasts, &c. The Christian guilds, which were not peculiar to towns alone, but which were also established in several country districts, are fundamentally only a development of the ancient *samburðaröl*, which, though originally for the most part pagan sacrificial feasts, acquired a Christian form; and, by the means, moreover, of certain laws which each member of the guild bound himself to observe with

reference to their mutual relationship, came in time to form coherent or convergent points for smaller combinations, the principal object of which was, not so much the enjoyment of social pleasures, as that the members composing them should engage to render powerful support to each other when necessary.

2. It was a natural consequence of the warlike propensities of the old Northmen that made them esteem so highly everything that tended to make their bodies active and strong, and themselves skilful in the use of weapons. Athletic and military exercises, therefore, were the general and favourite pastimes of the rising generation—pastimes which of course admitted of an infinite number of varieties.

Wrestling was divided into two different varieties, known under the appellations *fang* and *glíma*. The former corresponded, probably, very nearly to the modern hug, in which physical strength was the great requisite on the part of the combatants. The latter, however, depended far more on agility than on bodily strength; and the legs of the contesting parties were called into play more than their arms. This manner of wrestling is still much in vogue in Iceland; and that it was much admired and practised in olden times is satisfactorily proved from the fact of its being mentioned so frequently in the Sagas, and from the variety of “slang” terms for the different artifices the wrestlers made use of. Thus, when a man lifted his adversary bodily up in his arms, swung him violently round, and then suddenly flung him on the ground, it was called *sveifla*; when he tried to throw his opponent by a

turn of the hip (*mjöðm*), it was called *lausamjöðm*, or when he twisted his foot round his opponent's leg, *hælkrokr* (from *hæl*, heel, *krókr*, hook). In wrestling, the combatants used to strip as far down as the waist.

Nearly related to this pastime was the so-called *skinnlekr*, literally "skin game," of which there were different kinds. One of these was called *hráskinnsleikr*, or game with a raw hide, and was played as follows:—Two persons seized hold of either end of a raw hide, and he who could pull the hide away from the other, or drag him on to the ground, was the victor. Or else they tried to see whether they were strong enough to tear the hide asunder between them. This exercise was also known as *skinn-drattr*, or skin-drawing. Another game was to take a raw hide, roll it tightly together in the form of a ball, and throw it at a person, who had to try and catch it and throw it at some one else. But this game with the raw hide apparently belonged to a very remote age, for it is only mentioned in the mythical Sagas.

The different games played with a rope of skin in later times were doubtless a refinement of the game of the raw hide. One of these was for two people to take hold, each of one end, of a skin rope, and make a trial of their strength. If a man were very strong, he would take a rope in each hand, and challenge one or more to pull against him at each rope; and if he could thus, in a sitting posture, gain the victory over them, it was considered a very great honour indeed. Another game with the rope was to form it into a noose or slip-knot; and then for the con-

testing parties to lay hold of either side of it and pull. The one who could pull the rope away from the other was the winner. *Beltadráttr* was, doubtless, exactly the same game, only that, instead of a rope noose, a belt buckled together was used.

Another trial of strength consisted in this: one man hooked his right arm through another person's arm, and tried to pull him towards him, or else to force him to straighten his arm and relax his hold; this was termed *handkrækjast*, or "hook-draw." In this and in the above-mentioned game with the hide, it is said that in the very remote ages the competitors used sometimes to have a fire between them, thus making the game to be attended with greater danger to the losing party.

Leaping (*hlaup*) was a very favourite pastime among them. They used to practise leaping in heavy armour, leaping backwards as well as forwards, leaping down from elevated positions, so as to reach the ground standing, and leaping over broad and deep places. They used also to practise walking upon or clambering up steep places one against another, an exercise termed *brattgengi* (from *bratt*, steep, and *gengi*, to go).

To be able to walk upon the oar-blades while the boat was being rowed along was held to be a great achievement. The Norwegian king Olaf Tryggvesson is said to have been an adept at this. It appears, too, that in order to accustom their youth to this difficult art, they used to make boys, when very young, practise walking on the stretched out hands of grown up people.



The exercise of running was called *skeið*, and swiftness of foot was held in great estimation. Sometimes, in order to accelerate their speed, they would push themselves along with a pole. Running on "Ski" was a highly esteemed art. Not only did they accustom themselves to go at great speed upon them, but also to leap over steep and dangerous places, &c.

They used to skate, too, on the ice, after a fashion. Their skates were composed of the bones of some kinds of animals, and were called *isleggir*, or ice-bones.

Of swimming there were two kinds. Swimming on the surface of the water was called *langsund*, and being able to dive well, and to remain a long time underneath, was called *kafsund*. In addition to this they used to practise all manner of tricks in the water, and would wrestle both above and beneath the surface.

*Handsaxaleikr* was the name given to the game of playing with two small swords (*handsöx*) in such a way that they were thrown up into the air and caught without injury. To be able to play with three small swords at once, so that one of them was always in the air, was considered to be a great art. King Olaf Tryggvesson was also a great adept at this; and further, it is said that he could play at it while walking on the oar-blades of a boat in motion.

Military exercises comprised archery (*bogaskot*), throwing (*handskot*), and fencing (*skilming*). Skill in these exercises was called under one head, *vápnfimi*.

In archery, hand-bows and cross-bows were used. To

be able to shoot a long distance, and at the same time accurately, was held in repute, and it was a very general pastime to practise shooting at a target or *skotspónn*.

In throwing, stones or spears were employed. The stones were either thrown from the hand or propelled by a sling (*slöngva*). There were several kinds of spears, and of these the *gaflak* was the commonest. The most skilled throwers did not rest contented with throwing one spear at a time, but would throw two at once, one with either hand, and also catch their opponent's spear in the air and hurl it back at him.

Fencing comprised the use of the axe, sword, spear, and self-defence with the shield. The art of being able to throw a sword and a spear in the air, to catch hold of one with the left hand and the other with the right, and thereupon to deal one's adversary a blow from the quarter whence he least expected it, very frequently turned the tables in a hardly contested encounter.

There can be little question that riding on horseback, horse-racing, &c., were practised by the old Northmen at a very early date, though the Sagas say nothing definitely on this head. When, however, mention is made of a *turniment*, it is doubtless an appropriation of the customs of a later date. At the close of the twelfth and in the thirteenth centuries, however, there is every reason to suppose that equestrian entertainments of this description were not altogether unknown in Norway, as the "*Kongespeil*" recommends them as a worthy pastime for the "*hird*"-men. But there is no recorded instance of

tournaments similar to those in more southern countries having been held in Norway.

3. The games most frequently alluded to in the ancient Sagas are :—

Game at ball (*knattleikr*). In this game a large number of young people used to assemble on an open plain or on the ice. The ball, which was called *knöttr*, was made of wood or of some hard substance; and the bat with which it was struck, *knattré*. Two persons of about equal strength were matched together, and the game seems to have consisted in this, that when one of them struck the ball, the other tried to catch hold of it. Very frequently disputes would arise among the players, when one of them would strike the other a violent blow with the ball or with the bat.

Very little is known about the *sköfuleikr*, another game at ball. Only this has been ascertained with reference to it, that certain instruments were employed in it called *sköfur*, sometimes made out of horn; and that the game was not of the gentlest description, as lives were frequently lost in playing at it.

*Torfleikr* was a game in which two people used to pelt one another with turf. It was not, however, held in any great repute.

Dancing (*dans*) was also an ancient pastime among the Northmen. Whether it was in vogue in the old pagan days cannot be determined with any degree of certainty, though it is more than probable that it was, as it was much indulged in at the beginning of the twelfth century,

and was at that date severely censured by zealous Christian priests. The style of dancing adopted by the old Northmen, and which seems to have been peculiar to them, was very different from the dance of a later date. It was accompanied with singing; and musical instruments, at least in the remotest times, do not seem to have been made use of. The dancers used to dance to the air of the songs, which they sang themselves, and which were varied in their nature; at one time being love songs, at another of a satirical character, and sometimes of an historical nature. They were termed *dansar*, and it was one of their peculiarities that the participators in them had to adapt their features according to their tenor. Both sexes used to participate in this recreation. When they danced to these *mansöngs-vísur* (love songs), it seems that the men and women had parts allotted to them, which they sang alternately. This kind of dancing, as well as the songs themselves, were not unfrequently of rather a frivolous character, and met with a marked disapproval on the part of the teachers of the new religion.

Dancing to songs of a varied, frequently of an historical, character was in vogue in Iceland as late as the first part of the eighteenth century. Each of the dancers had his part to perform, which, together with the costume they wore, was adapted to the circumstances of the case. But when, for want of space in their houses, they resorted to the church, as affording more room for the proper execution of the dance, and much impropriety and indecency thereby resulted, all dancing was strictly for-

bidden in the island, and therefore speedily went out of fashion.

In the Færoe islands, however, this kind of dance remained in vogue down to our own times. The cursory explanations which the old Sagas give of the ancient style of dancing throws light upon the dances of the Icelanders and of the inhabitants of the Færoe islands; and the descriptions given of these latter, in turn supply what is deficient in the accounts given by the former.

Dancing to instrumental music appears to have been in vogue in the fourteenth century, if not at an earlier date, and was probably introduced from abroad. In the mythical Sagas of Herraud several dances to the harp are mentioned, one of which was called *faldafeykir*, so called because it was of so boisterous a character that the head-dresses (*faldr*) of the women used to fall off and be whirled round the room, owing to the violence of the exercise.

There is still another kind of dance, which was termed *hringleiker*, or the game of the ring. Only cursory mention is made of it in the Sagas, but it was probably the same as a dance still in vogue in Iceland, and which is termed *hringbrot*, or breaking the ring. The dancers take hold of each other's hands, and range themselves in a ring, a space, however, being left, so that the ring is not quite complete. The two persons standing at either end of the chain are the leaders of the dance, and are said "to break the ring." One of them then commences by dancing under the arms of the couple nearest to him, and so on till he has completed the round. All the

others have to follow, holding fast by each other's hands. When the leader has danced under the arms of the last couple, and the ring has resumed its original form once more, the person standing at the other end of the chain begins to dance in the same manner, and thus the dance is carried on by each in turn. If one of the dancers looses his hold the whole game is spoilt.

Finally, one other game must be mentioned, which seems only to have been in vogue in Iceland. It was a kind of burlesque on the legal and judicial customs of the island. The game is said to have been invented by one Brand Thorkelsson, an Icclander, in the beginning of the eleventh century; and such was the approbation with which it was received, that all the young men in the neighbourhood used to flock together to witness it, to the great chagrin of their masters, who complained bitterly of the inconvenience to which it exposed them.

4. When mention is made of plays among the ancient Northmen, it must not be supposed that theatrical entertainments are thereby intended, for there are no traces of such having ever existed among them; but rather other pastimes calculated to amuse the spectators. Their athletic and military exercises, games, duels, &c., may be regarded in the light of a dramatic entertainment, as they were held in public places, and in the presence of a large number of spectators.

At their public courts (*Thing*), where a large concourse of persons was always present, the young men would generally hold games and athletic exercises in the presence of

their elders, at such times as the business of the court permitted. And as these courts were usually held on places of wide extent, it was not difficult to find a convenient place for this purpose. Generally an open plain was selected, which was surrounded by rising ground; or else they were held under the lee of a hill, whence the spectators of both sexes could enjoy a good view.

Besides this, in certain districts, the young men would arrange special gatherings, at convenient places; and if the games lasted over several days, huts would be erected on the ground for their convenience. Occasionally some well-to-do peasant would hold one of these gatherings, and entertain those who came to it at his house. Occasions like these were looked on as regular holidays, and great numbers of people of either sex would throng to them. The approval of the maidens was by no means an object of indifference to the competitors, and many a first impression was there made, which subsequently resulted in a connection of a more intimate character.

Young men who were renowned for their strength and agility, used not unfrequently to make themselves of great consequence on such occasions; and would participate only now and then in the games, in order to eclipse the other competitors, preferring rather to talk with the girls. Neither were these latter inexperienced in finding opportunities to hold a conversation with their favourites. The ancient *Vatsdöla Sagas* afford an instance of this:—

Ingolf Thorsteinsson, from Hof, of Vatsdal, in Iceland, was the handsomest, the most agile, and the best athlete

of all the young men in the neighbourhood. The women were so in love with him, that, according to one of the popular songs, they all wanted to have him as their lover, even "the old woman who had only two teeth left in her head." In some games that were held one autumn, Ingolf distinguished himself greatly. They were playing a game with the ball, and it happened that the ball rolled by him to a place where the lovely Valgerd, daughter of Ottar, was standing. Quickly the maiden threw her cape over it, and Ingolf, who hurried after it to find it, did not omit to have a little talk with her the while. Thus their first acquaintance was made, and when Ingolf subsequently paid a visit to Valgerd's father, a little time afterwards, it ripened into an intimacy of a very confidential description.

But these gatherings not unfrequently turned out rather seriously; and this was especially the case when the young men of one district had challenged those of another to a trial of strength, &c. The overbearing conduct of the victors, and the wounded feelings of the conquered party, often resulted in deeds which transformed the games into a bloody battle; and the place where they were held into a field strewn with the dead and wounded.

It seems that in olden times the Northmen occasionally made their criminals do battle for life and death with wild animals, or else among themselves, for the public amusement.

Thus King Harald Fair-hair made an Icelfander, Bue Andridesson, against whom he was exasperated, fight with a wild savage from the interior of Asia or Africa. The



battle took place on an open plain, in the presence of the king, and of a large number of spectators. A large stone stood in the middle of the plain, pointed above, but of goodly circumference towards the base; and it was the aim of either of the combatants to throw his adversary on this stone, in order to kill him. They were allowed no weapons, but might only wrestle. Bue gave his opponent a heavy throw on the stone, whereby his breastbone was crushed in, whereupon the king received him into his favour.

A story is told of Hacon Jarl that he made an Icelfander, named Finnboge the Strong, who had killed one of the Jarl's kinsmen, fight with a wild man. "The Jarl," it is said, "made all his warriors assemble at the place of combat, and had his chair placed in the midst. Finnboge proved victorious, and broke the wild man's back on the stone. But even then the Jarl would not forgive him, and he was obliged, a little while after, to fight with a large tame bear, which belonged to the Jarl, while swimming in the sea. Finnboge succeeded in killing the brute, whereupon the Jarl pardoned him."

Olaf Tryggvesson is said to have had an Icelfander, who had slain one of his "hird," worried by dogs.

It may be objected against these instances, and perhaps not without good reason, that the last-named was nothing but a deed of cruelty on the part of King Olaf, to which he may have been instigated in a moment of passion; and that the two former, to which there are many parallel cases found in the most mythical of all the Sagas, are

derived from not very trustworthy sources. But, on the other hand, it may be inferred, from the authentic *Erbyggia Sagas*, that there really was an ancient custom that may have given rise to the (possibly) garnished reports of such contests. For it relates that at Thorsnes, in Iceland, where Thor's hill used to stand in the old pagan days, there might still be seen, at the time when the *Saga* was composed, "the ring in which men were condemned to be sacrificed; and within the ring," it further states, "stands Thor's stone, on which the men who were to be sacrificed were crushed; and traces of blood may even now be seen upon it."

From other sources it is known that they were criminals, principally from among the class of serfs, that the heathen Northmen used to offer up at their human sacrifices. Therefore, it is highly probable that, occasionally, if not as a general rule, they made them fight two and two in mortal combat, in the way above described, and, perhaps, gave the conqueror his life.

But if such scenes were looked upon as amusements, there is nothing unreasonable in supposing that they occasionally introduced a little variety into their sacrificial feasts, by making criminals engage in combat with savage animals, or with wild men of extraordinary strength. Possibly the great value the old Norwegian heroes and chiefs used to set on tame bears, especially the white bear, at a date long subsequent to that in which these combats were in vogue, may have taken its origin from this custom. It need not excite any astonishment

that the old Northmen, whose state of civilization was at a very low state of development, and to whose character a belief in the doctrines of paganism imparted a certain degree of harshness, should take delight in such barbarous spectacles, especially when it is borne in mind that spectacles of similar, or of still grosser, barbarity belonged to the most favourite amusements of the old Romans, and that, too, at the very zenith of their glory, at the golden age of their civilization. And, further, no sooner was Christianity generally introduced, than such scenes fell into disuse.

Another entertainment, which seems to have been of very ancient origin, and to have been a favourite pastime with them to a comparatively recent date, is the so-called "horse-fight," in which they used to set on two stallions one against the other, and make them fight till one of them, often, lay dead upon the field. For this purpose they used to train those stallions that had large and sharp fore teeth, which were called by a name signifying "battle teeth" in the old tongue. The owners of these horses would make an appointment among themselves for a horse-fight, which was always attended by a large concourse of men and women. An open plain, with rising ground, was usually chosen, as in the other entertainments, for the battle-ground, on which the spectators used to seat themselves. The stallions were then brought out in pairs, and in order to eprage them against one another, they would have some mares tied up close by. Each stallion was led, either by the owner himself, or by

a man whom the horse knew well. When they reared up and began to attack one another with their teeth, the men who followed them had each to incite his own horse on, which they generally did by driving them on with a staff, which they carried in their hands for this purpose. The most renowned chieftains used often to accompany their own horses to the battle, and sometimes got themselves appointed as judges beforehand, whose duty it was to decide, in cases of doubt, which horse had acquitted itself the best. It was of no rare occurrence for the two men who were urging the stallions on to begin belabouring each other with their staves, when they thought that the other had ill-treated his animal. Several couples of stallions would fight at these gatherings, and it was accounted no small honour to be the owner of the conqueror.

We should not omit to mention here that the Norwegian kings, and some of the chieftains, used to keep jugglers in their houses, to amuse the king and his "hird" with all manner of tricks. Harald the Fair-haired is said to have had jugglers who played tricks with dogs without ears; while others would hop round the fire on their heels, with burning torches in their hands, and flaming caps stuck under their belts. This can hardly refer to anything than to jugglers, who amused the spectators with their tricks and ridiculous style of dancing.

A story is told in Sverrer's Saga that, "When the bard Maane came to King Magnus Erlingsson as a pilgrim returning home, he found him and his 'hird' amusing

themselves by watching two jugglers making their dogs jump over high poles. The king ordered Maane to make a song on the jugglers. The bard sang two, in which he made 'ridicule of their tricks, their fiddling, and blowing on the pipe, with which they accompanied them.' The songs created great laughter, and were repeated time after time by the 'hird'-men, who stood round the jugglers in a ring while they sang them, so that the fellows were put in great jeopardy, and were very glad to slip away."

It appears, moreover, that the kings used sometimes to have court jesters. Thus Harald Haardraade is said to have had a Frisian dwarf, called Tuta, "who, for the amusement of the court, had to don the king's suit of chain mail, which was so much too large for him, that it dragged after him in the most ludicrous manner."

5. Two principal games are alluded to in the Sagas as having been great favourites with the old Northmen, namely, playing with dice, and a game resembling draughts.

That dice-playing was a very ancient pastime with the old Northmen may be inferred from the fact that in several barrows, in different parts of the country, dice made of bone have been found. These are different in shape to those used at the present day, as they do not form a perfect cube, and the two end surfaces have either no mark at all upon them, or one eye on each. On the other sides there are three, four, five, and six eyes; but the number two is wanting in every case. It appears further, from the Sagas, that dice similar to those now used came

into fashion soon after the introduction of Christianity. The "Konge-speilet" alludes to dice-playing for money, as being unworthy of a man of education.

The other game, called *Tafl*, was played with pieces on a board. In the ancient poem, the "Völuspaa," it is mentioned as having been a favourite pastime among the gods in the golden age of the world. The Sagas have preserved the names of several different kinds of this game, without, however, giving any clear information as to the manner in which they were played.

One of these games was played with dark and light-coloured pieces, amongst which one piece was more valuable than the others.

Another game, called *Skák*, resembled the modern game of chess, if it was not exactly similar to it. It was played on a board divided into squares, and with pieces which were distinguished by different names. Thus, some are spoken of as being called *riddarar*, or knights.

There was still another game, called *kotra*, about which the Sagas give little or no information, except that it was played on a different kind of board than that used for chess, and that sometimes boards were made so that chess could be played on one side of them, and this game of *kotra* on the other.

Both the board and the pieces were usually of ingenious and costly workmanship.

It may be presumed that these games were especial favourites with the old Northmen, for in several places in the Sagas a proper knowledge of their intricacies is

alluded to as having been a desirable accomplishment for a chieftain, while they are also spoken of as a pastime calculated to amuse the serving folk in their leisure hours.

6. Music was a favourite diversion amongst the old Northmen in the remotest ages of paganism ; though, in those far back times, it was probably of a very primitive kind, and was confined only to singing, or to a few instruments of a very rude description.

Whether the old "Skalds" (bards) used to sing their poetical compositions, or merely recite them, cannot be ascertained with any certainty ; but it is more than probable that the latter method was the one most generally employed.

Their songs, called *galdrar*, a kind of magic song, were not, however, recited as the others, but sung, as the expression *gald*, which denotes a more varied and elaborate style than a mere recitation, implies.

It is worthy of notice that there is an old tradition extant that the ancient Britons in Wales and in Cornwall, had learnt the art of singing in "*polytone*," at a very remote period, from the Northmen, a circumstance which may lead one to suppose that the art of singing was, to a certain degree, cultivated by the old pagans of Scandinavia. But, however this may be, certain is it that in this respect they were far behind the more southerly races of Europe ; for it is expressly stated, in several places in the Sagas, that the singing at the celebration of the Christian services (which cannot possibly have been

remarkable for its excellence, as the first foreign teachers of the new religion could scarcely have taken with them on their missions more than a very few good singers) charmed the pagan Northmen as "being something more beautiful than ever they had before heard."

The introduction of Christianity, therefore, gave a great impetus to the art of singing; and the important place it occupied in the services of the Church, which became considerably enhanced as the pomp and magnificence of these services increased, must have contributed greatly to its development and diffusion. Amongst the musical instruments peculiar to the old Northmen, certain wind instruments were undoubtedly the most ancient. The "Lur"\* was used as a martial instrument, and also to call the people to meetings. The present bark "Lur," still used in the country, gives a very good idea of its primitive form.

At a later date they seem to have called the simpler kinds of wind instruments, which were made out of metal, such as trumpets, bugles, &c., by the same name.

Horns, especially made from bucks' horns, were also ancient musical instruments. The famous Gjallar horn of the old Eddas was called a "Lur," whence it may be inferred that all wind instruments of a powerful and deep tone, especially those which were used in time of war, were classed under this name.

\* The "Lur" is a long horn made of birch bark, and resembles the Alpine horn. The peasants use it for calling their cattle. Frequently it has a very melodious sound.—ED.



The pipe was also an ancient instrument, and under this head may be classed all wind instruments of a weaker tone than the above. It is nowhere mentioned as having been used as a martial instrument; but the younger Sagas speak of it as having been employed, in connection with other musical instruments, at banquets and other grand occasions.

Among string instruments the harp was unquestionably the most ancient, as it was the most admired by the old Northmen. It is spoken of in several places in the old Eddas, and Jarl Rögnvald, who was born and brought up in Norway, enumerates, in a poem he wrote early in the twelfth century, harp-playing as one of the accomplishments he prided himself the most on. There is no detailed description of the way in which the old Norwegian harps were made. It seems, however, that they were sometimes of very large size, if any credit, at least, is to be attached to the testimony of one of the mythical Sagas, which speaks of a "grown woman being able to stand upright in the hollow space underneath the sounding-board." Mention is also made of the musicians using a kind of glove, furnished with small nails or hooks of metal, when they wanted to produce very powerful sounds from the instrument.

*Fidla*, fiddles or violins, are spoken of in the Sagas, as well as *gigja*, viols; and as fiddlers and viol players are spoken of in the same place, it may be assumed that the Northmen in the thirteenth century distinguished between the two names, which in former ages were used promis-

cuously, and thereby designated two different instruments. The viol was certainly known in Norway towards the close of the twelfth century; but whether it was known to Northmen in the pagan ages is uncertain. According to Snorre, both it and the violin were of remote antiquity in the north. For, in speaking of Huggleik, king of Upsala, who must have lived several centuries before Harald Fair-hair, he says, "in his 'hird' he had all kinds of musicians, harpists, players on the viol and fiddle;" and, further, of the Swedish king, Olaf Skautkonung, who flourished in the beginning of the eleventh century, he relates that "when the dishes were set on the king's table, the musicians entered the apartment with harps, viols, and other musical instruments."

There are good reasons, however, for questioning the accuracy of Snorre's testimony, especially in the first instance. It is very possible that in his enumeration of the musical instruments which were played before the "hird" in the times of the ancient kings, he has borrowed names which were in use in his own day. It is, however, remarkable, with reference to the other instance, that an Icelandic chieftain, named Mörd, who lived in the latter part of the tenth century, and was therefore prior to the days of Olaf Skautkonung, had the surname of *gigja*; a circumstance which seems to imply that that instrument was known in the north at that time; and, therefore, it is not improbable that it may have been in use among King Olaf's "hird."

The organ, and two other instruments, *simphón* and *psalterium*, are mentioned very frequently in the mythical

Sagas of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, at which period it may therefore be assumed that they were both known and used in Norway. The organ, it is known, was in use in southern Europe in the seventh century, although in a very imperfect form. At the commencement of the fourteenth century organs were not only used in Norway, but were even manufactured there. The *simpho* was probably a kind of wind instrument of the middle ages, and the *psalterium* either a kind of harp or a hand-organ. The writers of the same Sagas also allude to an instrument called *bumba*, which probably was a kind of drum or kettle-drum.

Singing, harps, viols, pipes, organs and drums, &c., are mentioned in juxtaposition to each other in the Norwegian legends of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, when any allusion is made to the music which was performed on great occasions; and this circumstance shows, more than anything else, that these instruments must have been well known at the time when the Sagas were composed.

It may be concluded, from several remarks in the Sagas, that it was the custom at an early date for the Norwegian kings, and also for the great chieftains, to have music played before them on particular occasions, and especially during meal times. But with the exception of singing and playing on the harp, which, from their intimate connection with the minstrel's art, and their relation with the divine services of the Christian religion, were held in high repute, it does not appear that the higher classes among the

people held music in any particular estimation. On the contrary, musicians generally seem to have been regarded by the old Northmen with a degree of contempt, and to have been ranked with jugglers, with whom, indeed, they bore the same distinctive title, *leikarar*.

7. From the most remote times the chase was a very favourite pastime with the old kings and heroes among the Northmen, as it, indeed, has been with nearly all races connected with them. The common people, of course, used to follow it as a means of sustenance, rather than as a pastime.

Sometimes they used to hunt with hounds, sometimes with hawks or falcons. The former were used in the chase of large game, such as elk, rein and red deer, the bear, and the wolf. The latter were used in the pursuit of birds.

The old Northmen understood the art of training dogs from the most remote ages. A hunting dog, in the old language, was called *dyrhundr*. The Norwegian chiefs used to keep a great many dogs, as may be seen from the Sagas, which speak of special servants being employed to take charge of them. And this office, moreover, cannot have been considered a menial occupation, as occasionally a chief's near relations served as his *hundasveinar*, or dog servants. Thus, for instance, King Harold Haardraade's master of the stables, the renowned Ulph Uspaksson, employed his own nephews to attend upon his hounds.

For hawking they not only used to train the ger-falcon, but also smaller kinds of the *genus accipiter*, called under

one head, *haukar*, or hawks. It is a well-known fact that hawking was a very favourite pastime over nearly the whole of Europe during the middle ages, and even to a later date; and there is good reason for believing that it was principally owing to the Northmen who had settled in France that it was so highly esteemed. Norwegian falcons were always held in great repute in foreign countries, and the kings of Norway could scarcely make a more valuable present to foreign princes than these birds.

Hunting, whether with hounds or with hawks, was carried on partly on foot, partly on horseback. They used to keep the hounds coupled together in a leash till the time came to let them loose, while the huntsmen held their hawks on their hands.

There is no doubt that women in Norway used to amuse themselves with hawking as well as the men, for we read of their having their own trained birds. When King Olaf Trygvesson's sister Astrid refused to marry Erling Skjalgsson, the king evinced his displeasure by having the feathers plucked out of her hawk. Still, it was more usual for the women "to amuse themselves in the nut groves during the summer time, whilst the men went out to follow the chase."

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## CHAPTER VII.

## FUNERAL CUSTOMS.

BOTH in the pagan as well as in the Christian ages, it was deemed a sacred duty by the Northmen, not only not to show any contempt to the dead, but to see that they were becomingly interred as soon as possible. In an old heathen poem we find the following :—

“ I advise thee  
To help the dead  
Wheresoever thou may'st find them ;  
Whether they be dead from sickness,  
Be drowned in the sea,  
Or be killed in battle.”

In the pagan days, a person who neglected to cover a corpse with earth was liable to be outlawed ; and in the oldest Christian laws, with which the pagan laws no doubt corresponded in this respect, large fines were imposed in case a person who had killed another should abuse the corpse of the deceased.

In the above-quoted Edda, the duties that should be performed to the corpse of the departed are briefly enumerated :—

“ A hillock should be thrown up  
For the departed one ;  
Hands and head must be washed,  
He must be combed and wiped dry  
Before he is placed in his coffin,  
And a peaceful sleep must be wished him.”

The first duty performed to the deceased was to close the eyes and press the nostrils together, when, owing to a violent death, they were widely extended. A near relative or intimate friend of the deceased usually performed this office ; which, in case his death was to be avenged, was considered as an incentive to the person performing it to see that speedy retribution was made. Then the body was washed and decorated, and the "death-shoes" were fastened on. When circumstances permitted, the body remained lying on a bier till it could be deposited in the barrow. If the deceased had been a wild and passionate man during his lifetime, and fears were entertained that his spirit would haunt the house he had lived in, some special customs were observed. The individual whose duty it was to wash and lay out the body, did not, in these cases, advance towards it from the front, because it was believed that the open eyes of the deceased would exercise a certain magic power ; but he approached from behind, and not till the eyes were closed durst any of the others touch the corpse. Neither was the body, in such cases, borne out of the house in the customary way, but a hole was broken through the wall, so that it could be carried out backwards.

With respect to the further treatment of bodies, different customs prevailed. They were either burnt on a pyre, and the ashes were collected in an urn, over which a mound was cast up, or they were laid in the mound unburnt.

Snorre considers the first-named custom to have been the most ancient, but at the same time acknowledges that

they were both used simultaneously, especially among the Northmen and Swedes. Still, the adoption of these rites gave names to the periods in which they were in vogue: thus, the time in which the former was customary was termed the "burning age;" and the latter, which was more recent, the "barrow age."

When the corpse was to be burnt, it was laid on the pyre in full costume, with the ornaments, valuables, and weapons that had belonged to the deceased. Horses, hounds, and hawks, or other animals which had been favourites with the deceased, and sometimes even serfs, were killed and burnt on the same pyre. Thereupon the ashes of the deceased were collected in an urn, and a chamber or depository of stone was made, in which were placed the weapons, domestic utensils, other instruments and valuables, and a barrow was thrown up on the exact spot where the pyre had stood. Sometimes a "Bauta stone," or cairn, was erected on the barrow in memory of the person buried there.

If the body was interred without having been burnt, a vault was made in the place of burial, composed of flat stones, and built in the form of a large coffin; or else it was constructed of timber work, and resembled an ordinary room. The body was then deposited in the vault in a reclining posture, or else placed on a stool. But in either case, it was decked with numerous ornaments, and was surrounded by the objects which had formerly been the most esteemed, and which it was believed the deceased might use in another existence. It



was customary, moreover, to deposit gold and valuables in the grave with the dead person.

Very often the dead person was laid in his ship or in his boat; and in all cases it seems that especial regard was paid to the occupations he had followed during his life. Stones and earth were heaped on the vault, so that the barrow often assumed a colossal size. When the grave was closed up, a wish that the deceased might have a blessed sleep was expressed. Several persons were often interred in the same barrow, especially after a battle had been fought. Sometimes the body of the deceased was deposited in the barrow of some relative or friend previously dead, which was therefore opened for this special purpose.

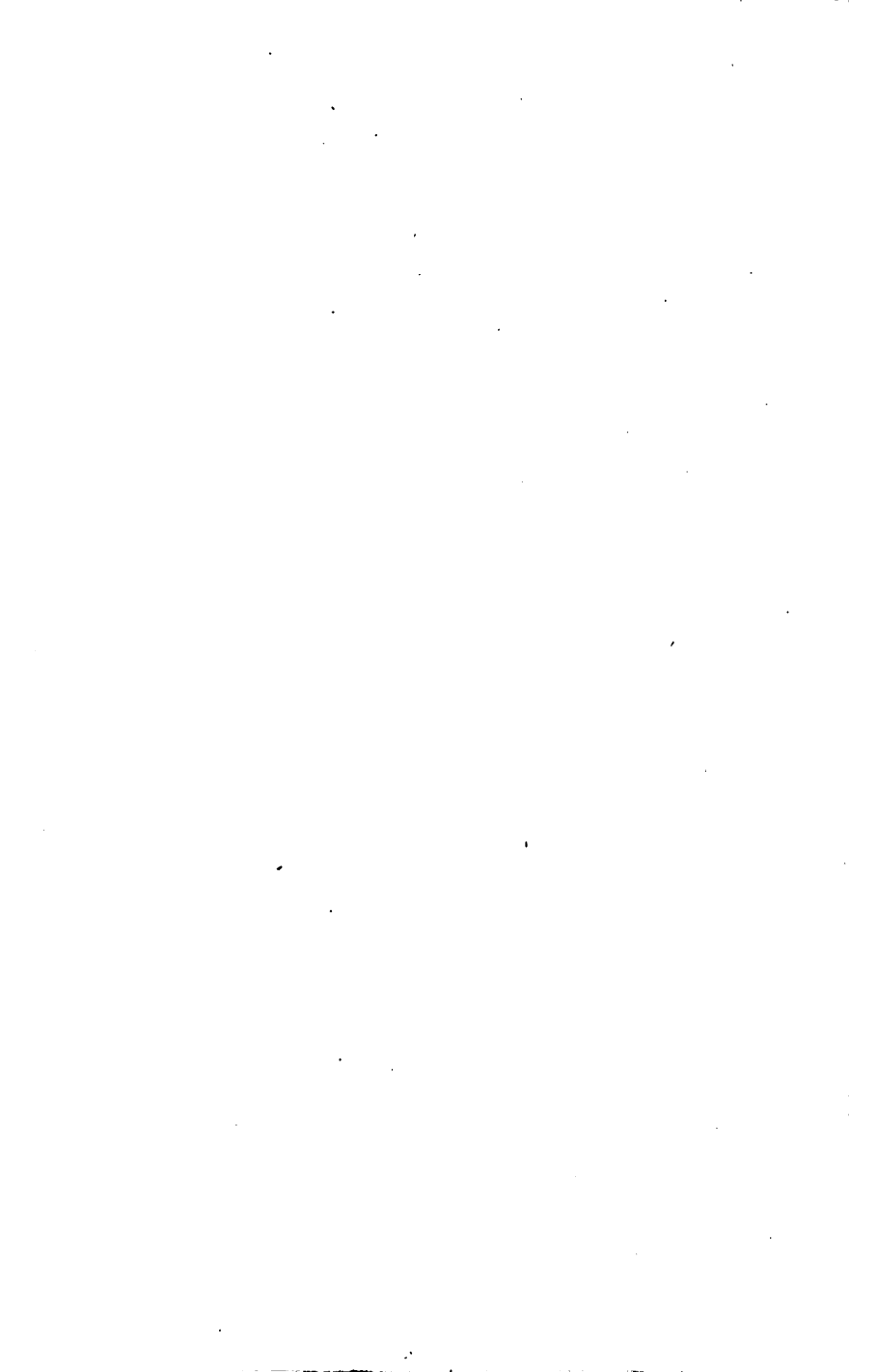
It does not appear that any long time elapsed between the death and the burial of a person. When these last rites were performed, it only remained to hold the "arvel," or funeral feast. This was a most important and solemn ceremony, at which the heir took formal possession of the deceased's property. On the same occasion, too, the debts of the deceased were settled, and a partition of the property made, if there were several heirs. The "arvel" could not lawfully be held till the seventh day after the death; it was frequently postponed to the thirtieth, and often to a much later day. If the deceased had been a renowned chieftain, one, or even more years might elapse before his "arvel" was held; and guests were then invited from all parts, even from very distant places. If the deceased had been master of the house, his

“high seat” remained vacant until the “arvel” had taken place. On the first evening of the banquet the heirs sat on a lower seat, sometimes on the footstool in front of the high seat, till the memorial toast had been given. When this had been drunk, they then seated themselves in the high seat, showing thereby that they now took the inheritance in possession.

On the introduction of Christianity, the interment of the dead in barrows naturally fell into disuse; and burial at the church, accompanied with Christian ceremonies, now for the first time began. The “arvel,” however, remained longer in vogue; though, by degrees, it came to be looked on in the light of a banquet held for the benefit of the soul of the departed, and, consequently, became more closely connected with the office of burial itself, and was held on the day of the funeral, in the presence of the officiating priest.











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